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CATERPILLAR, "A Gathering of the Tribes", is published & edited by Clayton Eshleman. Contributing Editor: Robert Kelly. Managing Editors: Caryl Rider and Brian McInerney. The magazine appears quarterly --Oct Jan April July-- ; present issue (#12) is Vol. III, #4. Yearly subscriptions are $6.00, and should be mailed to 36 Greene Street, NYC 10013, NY. U.S. national newstand distribution by Eastern News Distributors, Inc., 155 W. 15th St., NYC, NY. Copyright © 1970 by Clayton Eshleman. APPLICATION TO MAIL AT SECOND CLASS POSTAGE RATES IS PENDING AT NEW YORK, N.Y.

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cover collage: Robin Blaser

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'july 1970

Robin Blaser:

LES CHIMERES

(translations of Nerval for Fran Herndon)

THE SHADOW

I am the Darkness the Widowed the Unconsoled,
the Prince of Aquitaine in his broken tower,
my only Star is dead and my lustrous lute
carries a melancholy black sun

in the night of Death, You who consoled me,
give back the high hill above the Mediterranean,
the flower which pleased my desolated heart so much,
and the arbor where the vine branch unites with the rose

am I Amor or Apollo?
my forehead is still red from the Queen' s kiss
I have dreamed in the Grotto where the Siren swims

I have crossed Acheron twice, a winner,
modulating the sighs of a saint and the cries
of a fairy turn by turn on Orpheus' lyre

MYRTHO,

I think of the bewitchment
on that hill without care,
shining with a thousand fires,
your forehead overflowing
with eastern lights,
and black grapes
mixed with your golden hair

it is in your wineglass also
that I drank drunkenness,
and in the secret brightening
of your eye when you saw me
worship at the feet of Dionysus,
for Poetry made me a son of Greece

I know why the volcano over there
reopened only yesterday
you touched it with your quick foot,
and suddenly the sky was clouded
with ashes

since a Norman duke smashed
your gods,
the woody vine with the pale flowers
which do not bear
twines around the green myrtle
with the dark berries
under Virgil' s branches of laurel

HORUS

the god Kneph' s trembling
shook the universe:
then, the mother rose up
on her bed, Isis,
moved with hatred
toward her savage husband,
and the old fire
burned in her green eyes

she spoke ' Look at him,
this volcanic god and king
of winter is dying,
this old corruption'
she ordered his crooked feet bound
and his crossed-eyes put out
she said ' All the world' s cold
passed through his mouth'

she said ' Just now
the eagle flew by the new
ghost calls me
I put on the robe of Cybele
for him, the son
loved by Hermes and Osiris'

the goddess fled
in a golden shell
the sea reflected
her image,
the sky shone
under the scarf of Iris

ANTEROS

you ask why there is rage in my heart
and an untamed head
on a neck that could bend:

because I descend from Antaeus,
I turn the arrows back
against the winning god yes,

the Requiter breathes on me
he marked my forehead
with his angry lips

I sometimes feel the unquenched
redness of Cain
under Abel' s pallor
the paleness is stained

the last defeated by your genius,
God, cried out from his pit
of hell against your power
he is my forebear Belus
or my father Dagon

they dipped me three times
in the waters of Cocytus
  protector
of my plundering mother,
  on my own
I sow again at her feet
the teeth of the old dragon

DELFICA

do you understand this old ballad
at the root of the sycamore,
or under the white laurels,
do you know it, Daphne,
beneath the olive, the myrtle,
or the trembling willows,
this love-song which always
begins again?

do you recognize the Temple
with huge columns,
and the sour lemons
when you bit them,
the cave hiding an unexpected
end, part of the tale of the dragon's
seed?

you shed tears over returning ghosts
we read the sound of an earthquake
for signs

so, the sybil with dark skin
is asleep under the Arch of Constantine
nothing has troubled the cold gate

ARTEMIS

the Thirteenth returns
still the first
and she is the only moment
but are you queen,
'you', the first and last
are you king
you, the only or the last lover

love him who loved 'you'
from the cradle to the grave
the only one I loved
loves me dearly still
she is death---or the dead one,
delight torment,
the rose she holds
is the rose-pink hollyhock

Saint of Naples with hands full of fires,
or Rose with a heart of purple,
or Saint Gudula's flower,
did you find your cross in the sky's desert?

I want the white roses to fall
they attack our gods
I want these white phantoms to fall
from their burning sky
the saint of the abyss is holier in my eyes

CHRIST AMONG THE OLIVES

god is dead! the sky is empty
weep, children, you no longer have a father
Jean-Paul

1

under the holy trees,
the Lord lifted his thin arms
to the sky, as poets do
after the silence
and the loss of his friends'
belief

he turned towards those
who waited below. lost
in animal sleep, dreaming
of themselves as kings,
wisemen, prophets, but deadened
he began to call, God
does not exist

they slept

have you heard the news?
I touched my forehead
to the eternal arch
here, sick, broken
and stained for many days

I cheated you in this
abyss, god is missing
from the altar with its victim
God isn' t
God is never again

they always slept

2.

he began again:
everything is dead
I' ve wandered over worlds
and lost my flight
in their milky ways
as far as
inventive life bleeds
gold and silver

everywhere the dry ground
bordered by waters
whirlpools stir
the stormy oceans,
a faint breath pushes
the roaming spheres,
but no ghost exists
in this largeness

seeking the eye of God
I saw only a socket,
huge, black and bottomless,
where night which inhabits it
sends ray over the world
and always thickens

a strange rainbow
encircles this darkness
door-sill of the old chaos
whose shadow is the emptiness,
a spiral swallowing
the Worlds and the Days

3.

you, the fixed End of it,
the mute sentinel,
the cold Necessity, Chance,
who advances among dead worlds
under everlasting snow,
who chills the whitening universe,
bit by bit,

do you know what you' re doing
with your burnt-out suns,
Beginner,
are you sure to transmit
an immortal breath
between one world which dies
and another being born

father, is it you inside me
can you live and conquer death
or have you given up
in a last battle

with that night-time angel
whom the curse struck
this Myself,
the tears and sickness,
if I die,
everything will die

4.

no one heard the grief of the sacrifice,
the sacrificed pour his heart out
to the world vainly
weakening and stooped
he called the only one
awake in Jerusalem

you know the price
they put on me,
sell, and end this bargaining
I have a sickness
here on the world
you have the strength
of a crime, at least,
    in friendship

Judas went away,
brooding and malcontent,
discovered himself poorly paid
for such biting back
when he read his trick
written everywhere on the walls

only Pilate,
who sat watching for Caesar,
turned by chance
and feeling some of it,
ordered his satellites
to find the fool

5.

it really was this fool
a madman above us
forgotten Icarus climbing
the sky again
the charioteer destroyed
by lightning
a lovely, murdered Atys
brought back by Cybele

the magician questioned
the entrails of the victim
the earth became drunk
on the precious blood
the unmoved universe
bent on its axes
the gods began to die
for an instant

Caesar called Jupiter Ammon
to answer this new god
forced on the earth---
at least a daimon

but he invoked
a closed oracle
only one in the world
could open the hiding place
    who gave souls
    to the children of the slime

GOLDEN POEM

" everything is alive"
Pythagoras

free of the dead,
what can be thought
seems to be yours in this world
where it all coheres
free to spend some powers,
but the universe is absent
from all your plans

take the ghost stirring
in an animal each
flower, a piece of light
scattering love' s mystery
asleep in metal alive
the coherence takes power
over you

in the blind wall, you fear
the blindness which sees you
even to matter, put to
true and false uses,
a word is tied

often, a secret god exists
in the darkness
and like an eye born
with the lids closed,
a real ghost comes to be
under the surface of the stones

NOTE

GERARD DE NERVAL, Gérard Labrunie, May 22, 1808-January 26, 1855.

In this volume, I have translated Nerval' s twelve sonnets known as Les Chimères, which were published as a sequence in 1854 at the end of Les Filles du Feu. Seven of them had been published previously under the title Mysticisme in Petits Châteaux de Bohème, 1853. The change of title is significant. The poems do not seem to me to be mystical and I think Nerval must have wished to separate his poems from that difficulty. They live by correspondences between the personal and the mysterious, whether Nerval is drawing from the numerology of the Tarot, French history, or Virgil. To put it another way, these poems live by entrances to images of gods and goddesses; they lack the completeness and receptiveness I connect with mysticism. They seem to me to be about the mental death of god. They are among the greatest of love poems. In the preparation of these translations, I have studied Nerval' s works and his biography, investigated French free-thinkers, and the Fabre d' Olivet edition of the Vers Dorés des Pythagoriciens only to come to the conclusion that though many have done well by him, especially Jeannine Moulin in an annotated edition of these poems, far too much attention has been given the biography, where we are meant to depend upon the poems. The reader may be disturbed that I have only once kept the Shape of Nerval' s poems, but I have had to make These my own. Here it is true I wanted to give translations, not versions, but I have taken liberties ---there are omissions and interpretations---and I am handing them over to the reader with respect, care, and a considered knowledge of the French poems. I wish here to present poems, a first concern. In my view, these translations required that I become Nerval and yet remain my own poet.

Robin Blaser: THE FIRE

especially for Ebbe Borregaard

I am here writing about my poetry in relation to poetry. The writing had an occasion: for a few in San Francisco, where I read it last March 8th. I want to talk about the personalism and the so-called obscurity of my poems in relation to the sight, sound and intellect that compose them. "The test of poetry," in Zukofsky's words, "is the range of pleasure it affords as sight, sound and intellection."

One difficulty I want to describe is that I'm haunted by a sense of the invisibility of everything that comes into me (aware that nothing is more invisible than emotion---by emotion, I mean the heat of one's sense of the war, or a place, or a body, or of the extensions of these, the earth, the existence of gods, and so forth---the I-have-seen-what-I-have-seen, recorded by Pound in Canto II). I believe there is a reality, which, given the leisure to live for it, is neither conceptual and systemized in the ordinary sense of these words---or imageless. There are many times when, forced by exhaustion, I take the lazy way of the conceptual and imageless, but it is a kind of desire which leads me to write of that other, outside world. Because the personal stake in companionship becomes so great in the way I live, I am sometimes lost when a reader finds me uninteresting or too obscure, his interest too soon exhausted to come to any meeting. I am literal about that other reality. It is, I think, the purest story-telling to try to catch that light---and the difficulty of it, the loss of it is personal. If I see the light, even fragmentarily, and lose it, that too is subject matter, and leads to a kind of heartless poem, for it is not the elegiac loss which interests me, but the difficulty, the activity, of holding on to it. Burning up myself, I would leave fire behind me.

To hold an image within the line by sound and heat is to have caught something that passed out there. The psychological accuracy of this perception is not enough; the sculptural imagistic quality is not enough; and the very aesthetic quality of taking the one image, or even three images as a whole, the beauty of the idea that you can write a single poem, is a lie. The processional aspect of the world has to be caught in the language also. The body hears the world, and the power of the earth over the body, the city over the body, is in terms of rhythms, meters, phrasing, picked up---the body's own rhythms compose those or it would shake to pieces. --- The music of the spheres is quite real, but the sound of the earth must meet it. I suppose I want to say that the real business

of poetry is cosmology, and I' m claiming my own stake in this. And this is the activity of telling the story---the necessity is chemical---it is not invented, but it is original, personal, singular, and even domestic. If one man gives up his life for the world, the energy of it is not symbolical: it is the story of one man tied to the heaven and hell he recognizes. No symbols.

My friend Stan Persky was reading to me one night when a passage turned up that is so much to my purpose, slightly reworded, that I won' t give the author credit: it is in that meeting entirely mine: "What we describe as imagination is no free play of the soul, but a real meeting with real elements that are outside of us, and what matters is not to surrender to the images of fantasy that appear, but to redeem those elements themselves. What we suppose we effect merely in our souls, in reality we effect on the destiny of the world." ---Here, I wish to say that it is not language which is the source: it is the record of the meeting, and the magical structure of sight, sound, and intellect is indeed a personal responsibility. Language is given to us and in the most insidious way it controls sight, sound and intellect, but it is also a medium which can be shaped. --- Metaphor as a focus is an immediate escape from the ordinary focus, which rots for some reason I can' t explain, and keeps me always from using the word we, though there is a kind of we that I hope to earn the right to use. But the poem offers a field of energy and activity---to be met by whatever companion can be found. If you imagine, as I do, that, at any waking moment, you are a corpuscle in the left wrist of god, then any reality is precisely to be found in the flow of corpuscles in that vast body.

In the constant interruption that it is to go to work everyday, to talk in generalities of things that can only be known in specifics, this time guiding others through American writing, I' m struck by this thing called cosmology: Poe wanders off into a long prose piece, Eureka, which he calls a poem, and it is, drawing on all the contemporary science he can digest to record a cosmology; Emerson drops poetry and heads into poetically structured essays, wherein he can describe a cosmology; Thoreau drops poetry to write two strangely structured books, where, as in Walden, the detailed attention given to the seasons is cosmological; Melville goes about it backwards---in Moby Dick, myths had to be reset so that they could say what they should say about origins, where he is, then, later the poetry clanks along unable to hold on to what he wants; Whitman comes in with a new line, as open as he could make it; Henry Adams moves from the well-formed novel to the work on the great Virgin of the 13th century to tell in detail the story of a unified world; Pound puts it in the Cantos when he says the first thing was to break the iambic pentameter. It seems to me that the whole marvelous thing of open form is a traditional and an American problem---' hung up' on form because it was so difficult to open it. The whole thing came in a geography where the traditional forms would no longer hold our purposes. I was very moved when, some years ago, I was reading a scholarly book by Jo Miles in which she is making an argument for the sublime poem, which oddly has something to do with the public poem, and she begins to talk about the narrative of the spirit. I think the key word here is narrative---the story of persons, events, activities, images, which tell the tale of the spirit.

I' m interested in a particular kind of narrative---what Jack Spicer and I agreed to call in our own work the serial poem---this is a narrative which refuses to adopt an imposed story line, and completes itself only in the sequence of poems, if, in fact, a reader insists upon a definition of completion which is separate from the activity of the poems themselves. The poems tend to act as a sequence of energies which run out when so much of a tale is told. I like to describe this in Ovidian terms, as a carmen perpetuum, a continuous song in which the fragmented subject matter is only apparently disconnected. Ovid' s words are:

> to tell of bodies
> transformed
> into new shapes
> you gods, whose power
> worked all transformations,
> help the poet' s breathing,
> lead my continuous song
> from the beginning to the present world
>
> ((In nova ferat animus mutatas dicere formas
> corpora: di, coeptis (nam vos mutastia et illas)
> aspirate meis, primaque ab origine mundi
> ad meo perpetuum deducite tempora carmen!))

The sequence of energies may involve all kinds of things---anger may open a window, a sound from another world may completely reshape the present moment, the destruction of a friendship may destroy a whole realm of language or the ability to use it---each piece is in effect an extended metaphor (another word is probably needed), because in the serial poem the effort is to hold both the correspondence and the focus that an image is, and the process of those things coming together---so that the light from a white linen tablecloth reflects on the face of one' s companion, becomes light, fire, and the white moth which happens to be in the room is also light in the dark around the table, and is thus both the light and the element of light that destroys it. I ask you to remember that every metaphor involves at least 4 elements---which are a story, and the bringing them together is an activity, a glowing energy if stopped over, if entered. If the joy one feels in the sunny morning comes out as: the boat on the fire of the sea moves slowly to burn out---the story is of a boat on the sea---the fire is the sun on the water and the movement is of the boat, of the flow of the sun, and of the passing of the sun toward night. The joy of the movement is held a moment, then unfolds the story of the four elements, the boat and where it is, and the sun and what it is doing. (cf. Owen Barfield)

I wish now to extend these remarks by referring to some sources, which, in this case, were brought to me by Stan Persky, who has turned anthropologist, and who offers the pleasures of a real discourse. The gift is a passage in Edith Cobb. She says, "I became acutely aware that what a child wanted to do most of all was to make a world in which to find a place to discover a self. This ordering reverses the general position that self-exploration produces a know-

ledge of the world." Furthermore, while observing the "passionate world-making behavior of the child," she noted that "accompanied by a population of toys, fauna, and flora, and artifacts that do duty as figures of speech," she became "keenly aware of those processes which the genius in particular in later life seeks to recall." Edith Cobb in her interest in biological psychology moves to describe what she names a "cosmic sense," which in a separate essay, Margaret Mead describes as "a human instinctual need for a perceptual relation to the universe." This is the scientific basis for the proprioceptive process which Charles Olson speaks of. In this context, I am arguing not for my pretentions as a poet, but for what the poetry reflects, if it is entered. That the poet does the job of entering this world and continues through his life to record that entrance is a fact, not pretence---that it is personal, original, and singular is also fact. And here, I want to quote the ethnologist Frank Speck on the Naskapi Indians (Labrador). He says that among them the form of the earth is like a hill, and floats upon the water. He calls this a general concept, which is not true; it is a well-known image among them, and his informant, Charley Metowecic said that the earth' s form comes to be known only from the testimony of a man about to die. "In the vision that comes at this time the mind can view the universe and sees all around the earth as it rises above the water. And he feels it rocking." This is a statement which draws my attention because it is my own belief that any vision of the world is not complete until a man dies. I mean here that imagination is more a power to take in and hold than it is a power of making-up, though it must in its activity take responsibility for the uncreated.

I want now to describe some very personal matters---as indications of the singularity---the personalness of language and form. I want here to create the image of a field which is true history, and autobiography, as well as land, place and presence. I come to poetry with a definite sense of foreigness. Spicer once said that I was the only person he had ever met who could speak quotation marks and these always appeared around the slang words I used. Now that given thing language comes to me through a combination of settled Americans on the one hand and from immigrants on the other. On the paternal side, a grandfather, born in the south of France, and a grandmother born in Wales, who was deeply ashamed of any non-English elements. On the maternal side, a great grandmother, whom I knew, from Springfield, Mass., who came west with the Mormons, and was named West, and who had been secretary to Brigham Young. That grandfather arrived in New York in the 1880' s and came west to Sage, Wyoming, as a laborer for the railroad, and he was to work his way up to the exalted position of roadmaster and Bishop of the Church of the Latter Day Saints. My own Roman Catholic thing comes from that great grandmother' s hatred of Mormons, so that my mother and I were in turn sent to the Catholics---with whom we were both to learn the Star-Spangled Banner in Latin. In the midst of this interplay of talk about the revelation of god here on the American continent, somewhere on the Great Plains was my sense of it, and of the ritual mystery of the Catholic Church, performed for kneeling and rising men and women, we lived in houses that were always by the railroad tracks, sometimes between two railbeds---the houses were remodeled railway

cars, sometimes dining cars---with window after window where the tables had been. These were painted yellow and placed upon cement foundations. There was always a vast desert of sage brush, and in one' s place a small garden, watered from a well---of poplar trees, golden rod, and---the garden was one' s own population. Shoshone and Blackfoot passed at a distance walking beside their wagons or dragloads. The people who lived and worked in this land were largely foreign---Greeks, Italians, Mexicans, and so on. Their hold on the land, the houses, the work, and the language was like that of migratory birds. Cities were dreams---I have never forgotten the early morning hum of the city waking up in the first city I had ever seen---Boise, Idaho. Towns I lived in had populations of 8 persons, 14, seldom 20---Kimima, Wapai, Orchard. Cities were imaginary---like oceans. The name of a man would be a town. Blaser, Idaho, has, according to the current Rand McNally Commercial Atlas, no population. In this setting, that force to be English and American, settled, not migratory, forced that paternal grandfather to whisper any French words he wished to remember. And so far as I know, in this, I was his only companion. If we were alone listening to the radio, we would play at translating the words of popular songs:

Tu es la crême de mon café
Tu es le pois de ma soupe

Outwardly, to others, he was not foreign: the long southern a' s and trilled r' s of his French were secrets between us. He sported a goatee, and told me with increasing detail the strange tale that he was the lost Dauphin of France. This story and this language are fragmentarily preserved by me. None of his children knew it; my father denies his father was foreign born. When that grandfather was dying, riddled with cancer, I was called home from college to speak with him because the only words he knew were a childish French. And no member of the family knew enough to keep him company. That English and American thing had such force that the other English which most people spoke, more like Woody Guthrie' s, was also forbidden sound and thought:

I been doin' some hard travelin'
I thought you knowed

There was a step-grandfather besides, who was German, with one eye, and could not hide his accent. Because of his talk of the Kaiser, though the war was long over, they painted the house yellow, which was funny because the house was already yellow. But this was a bright yellow and when they threw a bucket of it over a window, the beautiful color was there, though it killed the verbenias in the window box. But the deer would have come to eat them anyway. Around this, like a circle with two circumferences, the house was surrounded by talk of Joseph Smith' s golden tablets, and the hatred of that talk. The laughter that a prophet could be named Smith still rings in my head.

I think every poet has a favorite imagery which helps him to explain the pre-occupations of his work. I have repeatedly chosen the Orphic, and in so doing, I will remind you of certain elements of Orpheus' story. Unfortunately, the usual reference to him covers his power in song over animals and rocks, and this has become thoroughly sentimentalized, ---the magic that it represents cheapened by the view that one wants power over rather than entrance to.

There is fairly good evidence that Orpheus was a man, another Greek hero, of early date, prehomeric, and that his life is closely attached to the realm of Dionysius who precedes Apollo at Delphi, and later shares the oracle with him. Orpheus' death is recorded in the story, his journey to hell, which he was able to complete only once, though at least four entrances to hell were well-known in ancient Greece. One part of his story has to do with the power of death over love and the power of death over the dead. The other part has to do with his death at the hands of the Bacchantes, when he is torn to pieces. His head floats down a river or over a stretch of Ocean and continues to speak in prophecies, but this is stopped by jealous Apollo, when he becomes really dead. Clearly, the Orphic Dionysius is being edited. In some peculiar sense, Orpheus is really repeating the life of Dionysius, the god who is both joyous and terrible, who is bringer of wine, who can be defeated, thrown into the sea by a mortal, locked in a chest, torn to pieces by giants, and who dies. That he holds within himself all the contradictions, the change and process of the world as it is known, and the terror that goes with that process, as Orpheus contradicts his power, has the power to charm with his music, but cannot charm the Bacchantes, has the power to bring Eurydice back from the dead, at least metaphorically, but cannot look at her. It is precisely in the image of the scattered body and mind of Orpheus that I place whatever I know about the poetic process---that scattering is a living reflection of the world.

I am thirty years old before I begin even tentatively to accept the title of poet. In San Francisco, I was tied to two other poets, Jack Spicer and Robert Duncan, who, it was my superstition, wrote my poems for me. When that notion became sentimental, I dropped it and became another poet. I have worked since 1955 to find a line which will hold what I see and hear, and which will tie a reader to the poems, not to me. This fascination precedes my great debt to Charles Olson, for it is in a school book problem, Plato' s description of the power of music over the body and the dangers of poetry in The Republic, and it was the fantastic pull of hearing Brodeur read Beowulf, a 100 lines at a whack on a good day, which led Spicer and me to compete in our translations to bring over the heat of that story. I am greatly moved by what is received and held with force in a poet' s work. And sometimes that work promises that a great deal more will be held. In 1945, August, when Jack Spicer came to Berkeley from Los Angeles, and wound up living with me, I had read little philosophy, and Jack soon led me into that mess, though he later turned violently against it. He was soon reading Leibnitz and Spinoza. I can' t say that a very great deal of this came over to me, nor did it seem to stick in detail with Jack, but I do remember discussions of monads and reflections. Recently, reading an exciting book by Frances Yates, The Art of Memory, I ran into a passage which brought back part of those dialogues with Jack. "...the monads, when they are human souls having memory, have as their chief function the representation of reflections of the universe of which they are living mirrors." Her book contains a description of the Memory Theatre, a box with tiers, where the initiate would take the place of the stage and look out on the tiers, which in an ordinary theatre would hold the audience, ---here there are images upon images, so that a man could hold the whole world in view. The idea is that the best means of memory is by

image, and the image will hold best when it is given a place. Here the place itself is built to hold the images. Were I in this theatre, and before I could take responsibility for the images of the whole universe or hold them, I would have to hold on to those images first, to dwell upon them, which hold the nature of two stars eminently important in my life:

Taurus: A man ploughing, a man bearing a key, a man holding a serpent and a spear. This is almost clear, but I can't say in which hand he holds the snake and spear, so the memory is incomplete, or uncreated.

and Saturn: a man with a stag's head on a dragon, with an owl which is eating a snake in his right hand. It is my view that the nature of this star cannot be held in a poem until the uncreated dragon is created.

I am trying to describe the foreignness, the outsideness, as a kind of metaphor for the sense I have of the process that leads to a poem, which again is outside, when made, and it is akin to translation, a word which in its parts holds the meaning of the word metaphor, the bringing over. This is here a problem of describing the process of inclusions, which as a man's work extends, enlarges and must take in both earth and sky. The heat I'm after is not simply the personal heat of the meeting, the recognition, but a heat and a passion which are of the nature of existence itself. The personal, yes, but then the translation of the personal to correspond with larger and larger elements, images of earth, is a process of inclusion---a growth of sensibility, in Valery's phrase, but also a making which is not self-expressive. To be included, to be caught to be brought over. Though I consider most of my work as a kind of translation, I have moved toward translation in the ordinary sense. My Nerval is an effort to bring over the chimeras of another poet, because the recognition was word for word. In doing so, I spent months trying to find the words in English to carry the heat of the Nerval world, which is cosmic, but also most personal. And it is this content which must be translated---not the word for word crib, but the actual heat of the process which gave form to the poems. Nerval begins in a real image of loss---the women of his world who disappear into the earth, and if they continue to exist, the realms of death have to be seen in terms of change and in images which hold that change. All this is most clear in one of Nerval's dreams, from which I took my lead:

"The lady I followed, displaying her slender form in a movement that caused the folds in her dress of changing taffeta to glisten, gracefully placed her bare arm around a long stalk of hollyhock, then under a clear ray of light, she began to grow in such a manner that little by little the garden took her form, and the flowerbeds and the trees became the roses and garlands of her garment, while her figure and her arms printed their contours on the violet clouds in the sky. In this way I lost sight of her in a process of transfiguration, for she seemed to disappear into her own grandeur. "Oh!, do not leave me! I cried...for nature dies with you."

Nerval took the ultimate responsibility for the other side of the world, like the old idea, before it was photographed, of the other side of the moon. He saw and recorded a world in which the sun is black, the alchemical sol niger, under

the earth yes, but in addition an in FORM ing vision. How personal the first vision of this was is seen in an earlier poem, which Nerval had adapted from a poem by Bűrger, and which I translated

The Black Spot

whoever has stared directly into the sun
thinks he sees before him, unyielding,
flying around in the air an ashen spot

really young once and a lot braver,
I dared to fix my eyes on glory
for an instant:
what my eyes craved left a black point

since then, mingling with everything
like a token of grief, everywhere,
in places where my eyes rest
I see it perch also, a black spot

ask me if this is always true it is
between me and fortune constantly
this bad luck and shared sorrow
if only an eagle looks in the Sun
and the Glory without punishment

Here, I wish to point to the responsibility of the poet for the experience of power as it is seen and felt in the world. And no more ultimate vision is possible than the one which tells the tale and holds the cost of the vision of the other side, the way down, sometimes the way up, the realms of deadness both in and out of the world---held in image, not a tract full of wisdom, but a reality created, held by image and sound. This is seen in the first poem of Nerval' s sequence, Les Chimeres, a serial poem, in his use of myth, original in his recognition---the tale behind the sirens---that they are indeed cursed muses, forced to be birds of the sea, which is the realm of love and eros. The siren is a seabird from her origin in this very ancient story. The image holds it absolutely. When I come to a work, like The Moth Poem, which is not a translation in this sense, it is, however, a translation of the record of the burning light and death of certain presences. I believe that all men live in this realm, the serious, intense kingdom, funny as it is at times, with its passionate thought.

And it is just here that an accusation is levelled at many poets. 'He writes for a coterie, the poets talk only among themselves. They live in a world of flattery and selfhood.' It is my belief that it is somewhere in this messy denial of the thought of poetry that an explanation can be found for the importance of community. That poets do band together. I am demonstrably bad at the kind of communism one dreams of, yet I have repeatedly worked in and added to a community of that sort. The reason is that only in such communities is the

necessary talk of this high, serious realm possible. Such communities tend to build a structure for men who wish to keep, hold, and record the passionate relation with the outside that the world, the nation, need. This is the only place where such talk goes on. That we have reached a point now here where such discourse must include the nation, our politics, the scholarship in which we tend to lay down the images of poetic thought---is obvious. This is a kind of memory theatre in which the poet with his craft is after not some thing or place remembered, but present. Nothing would be more painful or more costly to the mind, and ugly in a sense that great poetry may be very ugly, than a poetry in which the present war was present, held in sight and sound and intellect. Not opinion or reflection or dialectic about the presence. Few poets have caught the terror, which is the other side of the world. Those who have, Spicer, Pound and Olson for example, took a long time to burn---and their lives are of different lengths.

Robin Blaser:

The Holy Forest section from THE HOLY FOREST

for Stan Persky

TRANSLATION

The ash
came from Mt. St. Helena
They all fell
as by the same wind
Rooted in springs
the stone-filled trunks
stretch out

or an oak grows
from the rock bark

I turn more to the fire
on the manzanita branches
where the bees light

than to the prehistory

Of the ghosts of young
cherry trees,
there is an appearance
on the way back

WINTER WORDS

O fountains, where the throat
is a silent partnership, part of

the folklore of birds,
the news is

these sorrows
on a dream tree

rigged and actual

(the diaries of friendships
have almost won a nest for themselves

the life in art fashions itself,
returns, gazes upon the traffic

(has the cold caught
my hand in the game

torn

an invisible entertainment
somehow
falls upon all things

THE STORIES

our suppers stunned on the table
hold radios
hold
flasks of sound,
sharp intensities
bottled up for a time

I taste your imagination, authors,
and place it among cotton trees
whose white stuff perches,

cousins of the air

if the manner could be political
the high walls protect against disgust

the lady of blue glass
joined by
Pierrot, a griffin, papers, books,
the chilled correspondence, and
another woman whose futurist shape
suggests lines of the wind

on my desk

to awaken
the traffic would have to run into the radio

IN A DARK

the drive to the spring mountains
rising out of the vineyards, now
yellow with mustard

within a room
the lost quiet of stiff peach trees

the white buildings must be miles back
with invisible windows

where secret birds fall

THE PRINTS

the snail paths glistening underfoot
lead anywhere

some other
distance put the story down

of a prince who, tired
of his nobility,
found the cupboards offered
sweet companionship

open and shut
'we
take up where left off
all flowers and short steps
among the trees'

the marvelous we had lost
came back arms,
stone, bristling hair bend
toward the heart

LOVE

the water moved the
false stars

the forest which is
both a wall and a city

is claimed by specialists
in ecstasy, short of breath

is obscured by oppositions
of that louder voice

so we move
easily numb to a dark
reading
                a wing
that is alone
                    a black
which traditional sights
like teeth
and old tales give up

THE PRIVATE I

the white dog is blind
intent upon its master' s
footsteps walks into
my black dog

the moon is full
the fog is across
her in motion
a high wind
does not touch our place

the effort has been to make it one
in the teeth of it the fire that
is bright in one street, a pale striation
in another gone to be relit

an assurance at the edge of the wood
(the profit) almost enters
a conjunction of tall glass
buildings and Greek pillared banks

' It' s all right, mine' s blind' he called the
white is blind in public show, the alphabet
washes the sidewalk the years taught the personal
to stand on a rise of ground within the sign
out there
water runs in across the fingers

and among silent rings
the wind comes down in a cloth

SONG

in the night
the only brightness
a wisp of smoke
a
bird curled out of the leaves
in one shape or another
became the preoccupation
of the string

an accident of distance
where the dark tore
to see

on the way,
a horse,
the ground, a gift,
a horse of footsteps

simple

1ST TALE: OVER

it was sweet you spoke sweetly
and the child was dumb
your vocabulary had been praised
beyond your age
                the child
patted the dull face of the puddle
turning back. his head lifted, as

each year a congress of birds collects
to drop those sounds

the guttural taste upon your tongue
was borrowed and remains
the wings lift, an advantage

of hallucination, to set straight,
to drop down
            and remain
an invention

which, taking them up,
cuts across all lands

2ND TALE: RETURN

the oldest one and his sister and brother were
lost and he thought, telling a story
will keep fear away. so he began

the right path is further to your left
where the well is. and he looked
into the water and the water looked
back. now it is certain that water
is a magical substance. it will drink
up all things. and I am told this is
most like love, who stood near the
high way, and because it is one of
the few bare places the world has
ever known, love asked directions,
but the high way ran on. now it is
certain that the high way is a magical
substance. it will lead inside the
shape of things. and I am told this
is most like love, who has an amazing
ability to surprise travellers. love
asked the first hitch-hiker to spend
the night with him at the side of the
high way, but the hiker went on. now
it is certain that a hitch-hiker is
a magical substance which moves along.
and I am told this is most like love,
who has an amazing ability to pass on.
love, then, was quite alone the next
morning, and he stood stock-still
trying to understand, because in the
bright sun, the high way appeared to go
straight on without curves, turn-offs
or junctions into a kind of watery
air. the rule is, walk on the left
side facing traffic if you don't want
to be killed. this love did
until after a very long time, he
entered the watery air, which, I
remember, is when

they were found

: AT LAST

to be nowhere as you say

I suppose the trees will lift up
out of nowhere

and that youth in the light-distance
will be seen contrary

against the self-centered equation,
among bunkers at Fort Cronkite, (your story
having forgotten youth is that far)

and this one, the mixed mythologies,
a dissembler of knowing more

but what is it the repetitious
fascinations of the body make, as
a weaving
  I would tear off
leaving clear, an un
interrupted view of what / where

you keep
company

APHRODITE OF THE LEAVES

in
some lie told to draw
you forward

the city is all light the
movement all close
to the skin you have been
and closing like flowers
your hand tears everywhere
from nowhere
'I'
he calls, 'I' the place chosen
beyond which there is no further
neon

in fragments
in some object
the city is loved,
glass
cut into light

THE CITY

wept by a pool
midway, the lover' s conversation
claimed itself like the
old head of the wandering Jew
painted on leather, the head
follows the voice, a fluid
that is a body

the mirror is to be read the
water moved faster than the eye
the radio ambles in between the
lines of it is a sound, a part
of a letter
the forest is
somehow a wall, no, she has
knelt down and the folds
of her gown are around her the
rugs in the sun are silent the
color itself sounds these
filaments of pale light, filling
what is it lifts from the
floor, is now waist high
at arm' s
length, tangled beyond
one fountain ?

THE TRANSLATOR: A TALE

first, the pool of water just waking my arms hold
it the circle of the cold morning air

last night' s coffee spoon sticks to the drainboard
under it the clear print of a brown moth, made of sugar,
cream, coffee with chicory, and a Mexican spoon of blue
and white enamel

the ashtray is full and should be emptied before work-
ing that translation, Attis ran to the wooded pastures
of the weavers of gold, the shadowy place, where as if a
bee stung his brain, he took a flint knife and let the
weight of his cock and balls drop from him, so

when she felt her limbs lose their manhood, still with
fresh blood spotting the ground, she grabbed the drum
with snowy hands, beating the polished hide with soft
fingers, she rose to sing to her companions

the mound of cigarette butts moves, the ashes shift,
fall back on themselves like sand, startle out of
the ashes, awakened by my burning cigarette, a brown
moth noses its way, takes flight

SOPHIA NICHOLS,

the wind hits and returns it is easy to personify
a new place and language, but the new body stings

these men with green eyelids, drawing their worth,
it was rumored, from Egypt, knew

the work is part of it a power arrived at the
same thirst

he borrowed a head for a day

but which head the phrases tremble in the other
mouth it is true and false the veil of her face,

an old porcelain, not for the hand to comfort she
moved beyond the sop one gave for affection ' My

success has been to keep duty and love alive' she said
her hand waved with the power of disease Sophia

Nichols of the orchards, the deserts, the flooded
ponds and games wherein the moon sought our feet

died with a mouth full of tumor it is true and
false the moon flowers (that is Blake talking)

tonight it is the half blossom and the stars too
above this mud are from the other mouth this city

untouched the streets, Hotel Lyric have a foreignness,
a place outside a window a sound of bees pulling

the lilac above cement this wonder (the other mouth)
that crickets were men once who so loved the muses they

forgot to eat now fed on thistles, the language must
sting the flesh turn to a dew (the other mouth) the

loss, some glistening blood on the leaves of the mirror
plant Sophia Nichols of the story, the golden rod,

of the snake that entered the cage and ate the captured
sparrows, the telegraph keys, pale yellow paper, of

the Odyssey and the homing stories of the soul, the sea
imaginary, light and foaming green on the rocks dark

further out as the eyes of the cat

if she would be
free from words, she would free me even in the night

there are birds summoned by words

A GIFT

(homage to Creeley)

there are in this room, two tables
and in this one, three

they are full of invisible motion
shaped out of their origin

oak, redwood, mahogany
out of the window boy thieves

with flashlights in the fig tree
no bodies distinct from their souls

no city distinct from a language
iron tracings of the new Wells Fargo

Building (42 stories)
through the fog, welders' lights glow

the Grapevines twist around
the city in your mouth

a concurrence the poet' s kiss
given, caught like a love-adept

on my lips the attraction
of it scattered in public

where, now and then, god
knows you your love
doesn' t count in this

BOTTOM' S DREAM

because it has no bottom,
no opening, Bottom' s dream
left him friendless he is,
according to the actors, translated

across America, the slime
sticks the mists rise above the cities
whose guides are homeless

love' s mind closes the curtains,
draws back, acting a part
in the kitchens

the marriage to this -- it is
no match

the work, so much moonshine
on the ladders this
a wonder the land drinks up
through a crack

under the oaks, the strewn pieces,
his pieces in the forest -- there
recognized for what they are glass
in this circumstance

THE FINDER

on the windows, the dirty film
in the sunlight shaped by the shadows
of apple trees dry winter branches

on English Bay a ship appears,
its hiding over two masts, a doubling
of the cross two Christs

one matching the other where
the world dies

the tabloids of fire, a Sunday supplement
to the San Francisco Examiner out of place,
in this time rises from the page

in a lightning storm which holds
this man at the horizon in his apocalypse,
a war burning, if the heart scores

bodiless, a curious blood and reasons
in ourselves inheriting the intellect
from out there defined by a President

who is violence in this world,
a definition of this destiny we have
effected all' s well without

' your' intelligence where the world dies
I bend ' you' to my mouth
and suck ' your' breath away
only worlds caught

in the glinting lights of those
pieces of glass found in the
forest under a tree crushed

and shining

OUT OF THE WINDOW,

the sea is afire
out of the window, the desire is the
angelic presence, but then I may
desire the fire turns, out of the
window, half earth, half sea
are burning

and in the loss
of heart, an entrance, a roadmaster
all the buildings are down Orchard
is gone, removed by the Company,
swept by sand driven into the
desert the birth dries

I have lost my heart, and to say
this, unwounded, I am talking
about invisibility I would
have you eat of it, the betrayers,
and this president, this old man
whose definitions are down, out
of his time, government proved
at last to be the enemy because
there is no presence in his thought

I would have the betrayers eat of it,
because afire, the heart has that
permission to desire because out
of the rock and brush of the first place
toward the land of this sight,
sound and intellect, the consumed heart
has the courage to be lost half
earth, half sea burning

MERLIN

I could have stopped over it
you could have passed by

this blackbird, the shadow of
other birds, whose old name
means an action between worlds--

a breathing in a pane of glass
heavy layers over the swans he thought

with companions, he left the heart
of the land in a glass house
like floating in somebody' s window

these men rode naked on chosen beasts
of what they named died like trees
wounded when they were tired

of the movement something moved,
not separable from the endless knot

everything that moves makes stops, tying
the blood to the place if it is a city

it belongs to that event in poetry
which brings the next day in

the words are the city, the future,
the poem laid out

the movement in so far

THE CRY OF MERLIN

out of the blue that moves the curtain
out of the stone that smooths the body

statuesque that spiritual thing inside outside
on and on over us out of us to be

joined sundered the active image
of a man who stepped out from a cracked egg

the room is unmoved the lamps burn
only for themselves the story

seems the whole business the out the taken
the lifted the lost in the shape

or unfolding as in that exact moment
the rose opens for which there is no word

shedding by a strange sweetness

the friends built a city, enormous images
and high thought, and shed it

like clothing on the floor beside the bed
all these Pacific Slope men came to the sea

as if they just got here by stagecoach
or revved-up Model A with a rumble seat

and made out in the brown grass
which caught in their hair and sweaters,

the tell-tale -- the cock swelling
in the mouth fills the throat

the lips tight with the strangeness
the mouths, so far apart, meet

in the air the space between love's
substance and him is here recorded

he leans over the loved body
to kiss the belly blue veins
at the surface lead the life
he wished to enter a ghost
river true and false as a map
made up to change the boundary

the domestic glares a circle
that holds within it prickteasers,
mindfuckers, and the beloved,
a mix like a movie on television
or two radios, one upstairs and one down,
sending parts and flowers
in another body

here he was caught the room unmoved
with the lamps out I think he heard
the tick of the leaves of the plants
drawing together and the clock
he sticks a triple branch of daphne
into the head of the lady in the shape
of a blue bottle by the light
of the street-lamps, she shone
and looked lovely, when she said,
' This is the first time you' ve given me power in the house.'

envoi

A lion padded down the sidewalk toward him, shedding light. He knew he began then to talk -- loud enough to wake the neighborhood. Face to face, the lion rose up, as if to greet him, but inside the lion, barely visible, he saw a line-drawing of a man. Then, the lion dropped on all-fours and followed the sidewalk. Turning suddenly, with his right paw, he threw a piece of light -- it seemed to have no form -- it was not a jewel, -- a piece of light -- and it glowed a little red before it was gone.

the friend passing through the bedroom, the forest, the sea, the city, the brown grass, the mountain, the fountain, the friendship could hear the dream-talk -- the garble -- the language withholding the words -- the non-sense catch at

what he cried out of

PINDAR' S SEVENTH OLYMPIC HYMN

for Diagoras of Rhodes, winner in boxing, 464 B.C.

Strophe

Take in prospering hand a shining cup
which holds the vine-flow
and proffer it, flecked with foam,
to the young man, who will be bridegroom:
"Our houses meet!" True
gold, this pride of fortune,
this feast to celebrate
a new friendship, to raise him out of
the guests' envy of
the bride' s love:

Antistrophe

so, I pour no lesser libation, this nectar,
this Muses' gift . it is my mind' s gift pours,
delighting,
propitiation for the victories at Olympia and Pytho.
a man is possessed by the good turning to name him:
another time, the Beauty of the Gift (of freshness)
looks over another man, and his initiation.
the phorminx' sweetness and the many-toned oboe

Epode

accompany us on shipboard . now Diagoras and I
come to land where
I sing of
the sea' s child by Aphrodite, Rhodes, bride of
Helios . this poem repays him who, out of the boxing-
match,
unflinching, fit to be crowned at Alpheos' River with laurel
and at Kastalia, is mythically larger and his father
Damagetos, whom Dike gathered,
who both live on the three-citied island,
among Argive spearmen,
near by the headland of far-spreading Asia.

Strophe

I bear the news I put the events
straight for the thought of their beginnings,
from Herakles,
from Tlepolemos first, wide ruling,
from their father's source, they spring up joyous
from Zeus' disquise . they are Amyntorids
from Astydameia's mother-right . numberless
errors hang around men's minds no way to invent

Antistrophe

now or at the finish, not-knowing, a man's best of the gods'
gifts.
and so, Alkmene's bastard brother, Lykymnios,
came from his mother's rooms at Tiryns, Midea's,
to die struck down by the hard wild-olive staff,
embittered, the raised hand of Tlepolemos, who founded
this island so mania enters the mind's skill
and drives the knower to wander off . he went to ask the
god's voice.

Epode

in the adytum fragrance, the Golden-Haired One
spoke of his ships' sailing straight out of wave-breaking
Lerna
to that sea-girt grassland where
the king of the gods, once let fall a gold-storm,
gold snowing . the high brightness drenched the city,
the smooth-bronze axe cut . Hephaistos' handwork.
Athena, out of the crown of her father's head, sprang
joyous shouting called out.
Awe wakened Ouranos and the mother Gaia.

Strophe

and the daimonion, the light bringing, Hyperion' s
son, commanded his loved children to guard
over the event, mindful of the debt,
first founders of the goddess' altar in clear view
and the holy offering set in place,
kindling the heart of the father,
stirring the maiden of the whistling spear . Prometheus
and Aidos, who measure with awe, caught men up
with prowess and the joy acts inward and outward from the
first thought.

Antistrophe

unexpected, a cloud intercepts us nearby Lethe
the virtu is lost out of place
in us into the air
they did not carry the sperm-fire when they climbed the
high hill
no glowing ash at hand . without fire, they prepared her
grove.
above the Akropolis, Zeus gathered the clouds,
pale-yellow, and sent a gold rain upon them, and the Owl-
Faced,

Epode

glaring, silvery, sent a long companion-gifts,
every art, and they surpassed all the men of the earth
with the skill of their hands . shaped as if life caught
them
and motion, their works lined the streets . word
spread far and wide . art' s language
discloses powers without trickery sophia when
men tell old legends: when Zeus and the deathless gods
chose shares of the earth, Rhodes was not yet
seen in the sea' s open water, the sea-land hidden in the
salt-deep.

Strophe

Helios was gone and no one pointed to his share of it,
no place was apportioned . so the sacred Sun
was left out he questioned and Zeus settled
to recast the lots . but Helios stopped that
when he looked down into the gray-clear sea.
he said I see the mantle swelling out of the sea-floor,
I see my lot rising abundance for men
from gaia and hillsides for good flocks.

Antistrophe

quickly, he called Lachesis of the gold-bound hair
to raise her hands to swear by the high oath of the gods,
without double-talk,
bending her head along with the son of Kronos: the island
would be his share, left to him alone after she shot up
into the bright air . the talk over . from where
he looked down, his desire fell to meet her budding against
the sea-spray,

Epode

the sea-land is held by the dazzle of the sun-flow, father
who reins the hard-breathing horses' fire . they mixed,
and Rhodes bore seven sons, who take up
his gift of thought, most knowing among the first men,
as their father gave pieces of land from gaia to Kamiros
and the first-born
Ialysos, and to Lindos, divided three ways, wide apart
with cities named for them and three rock-seats.

Strophe

it let loose the outcome of bloodshed (the other face)
turns the
hardship to sweetness : set for Tloptolemos, the first
from Tiryns,
god-like,
burnt offering of sheep there, the procession . and
Diagoras
twice in the games' judgment stood crowned with flowers,
and four times at famous Ismos the good fortune again
and again at Nemea and rock-strewn Athens;

Antistrophe

marked by the bronze shield at Argos, by his skill at Arcadia
and Thebes, by the crowds at the old games of the
Boeotians,
at Pelana, and at Aigina, six times the winner . at
Megara
the stone tablet tells no other tale . O Zeus father,
guardian of wide-backed Mt. Atabyrios, take
this hymn (the marriage-cry) set for the winner at
Olympia,

Epode

this fighter who, among the powers, met skill' s beauty,
matched his own clenched fists let his gift be in the eyes
of townsmen and strangers over him, the Graces
turning against hybris he travels straight on the way
his fathers left aware of the good turn of events
surely do not hide this share of the gift
of the seed of Kallianax : the Eratidai
are touched by
gods' love, the city holds the beauty of the flower-
bringer
Thalia . but in a moment, the winds hit and turn

bound for

inscribed in gold letters in the temple at Lindos

translated by Robin Blaser

*

Jack Spicer: POEMS 1946 - 56

The dancing ape is whirling round the beds
Of all the coupled animals; they, sleeping there
In warmth of sex, ignore his fur and fuss
And feel no terror in his gait of loneliness.
Quaint though the dancer is, his furry fists
Are locked like lightning over all their heads.
His legs are thrashing out in discontent
As if they were the lightning' s strict embodiment.
But let the dancing stop, the apish face go shut in sleep,
The hands unclench, the trembling legs go loose--
And let some curious animal bend and touch that face
With nuzzling mouth, would not the storm break--
And that ape kiss?

BERKELEY IN TIME OF PLAGUE

Plague took us and the land from under us,
Rose like a boil, enclosing us within.
We waited and the blue skies writhed a while
Becoming black with death.

Plague took us and the chairs from under us,
Stepped cautiously while entering the room
(We were discussing Yeats); it paused a while
Then smiled and made us die.

Plague took us, laughed and reproportioned us,
Swelled us to dizzy, unaccustomed size.
We died prodigiously; it hurt a while
But left a certain quiet in our eyes.

PSYCHOANALYSIS: AN ELEGY

What are you thinking about?

I am thinking of an early summer.
I am thinking of wet hills in the rain
Pouring water. Shedding it
Down empty acres of oak and manzanita
Down to the old green brush tangled in the sun,
Greasewood, sage and spring mustard.
Or the hot wind coming down from Santa Ana
Driving the hills crazy,
A fast wind with a bit of dust in it
Bruising everything and making the seed sweet.
Or down in the city where the peach trees
Are awkward as young horses,
And there are kites caught on the wires
Up above the street lamps,
And the storm drains are all choked with dead branches.

What are you thinking?

I think that I would like to write a poem that is slow as a summer
As slow getting started
As 4th of July somewhere around the middle of the second stanza
After a lot of unusual rain
California seems long in the summer.
I would like to write a poem as long as California
And as slow as a summer.
Do you get me, Doctor? It would have to be as slow
As the very tip of summer.
As slow as the summer seems
On a hot day drinking beer outside Riverside
Or standing in the middle of a white-hot road
Between Bakersfield and Hell
Waiting for Santa Claus.

What are you thinking now?

I am thinking that she is very much like California.
When she is still her dress is like a roadmap. Highways
Traveling up and down her skin
Long empty highways

With the moon chasing jackrabbits across them
On hot summer nights.
I am thinking that her body could be California
And I a rich Eastern tourist
Look somewhere between Hell and Texas
Looking at a map of a long, wet, dancing California
That I have never seen.
Send me some penny picture-postcards, lady,
Send then.
One of each breast photographed looking
Like curious national monuments,
One of your body sweeping like a three-lane highway
Twenty-seven miles from a night's lodging
In the world's oldest hotel.

What are you thinking?

I am thinking of how many times this poem
Will be repeated. How many summers
Will torture California
Until the damned maps burn
Until the mad cartographer
Falls to the ground and possesses
The sweet thick earth from which he has been hiding.

What are you thinking now?

I am thinking that a poem could go on forever.

TROY POEM

We,
Occasioned by the eye
To look,
And looking down
Saw that your city was not Troy.

Oh,
Merry Greeks,
We bear our fathers on our backs,
And burdened thus
We kiss your city.

Neither
At foot or eye
Do we taste
Ruined Troy
Which was our mother.

Oh,
Merry Greeks,
When you embrace us,
We, bending, thus
Pray against you:

"Rise
From our absent city
Tough as smoke--
Oh,
Flesh of Hector,
Rescue us."

A DIALOGUE BETWEEN INTELLECT AND PASSION

Passion is alien to intellect
As hot black doves are alien to trees
On which they do not rest--
All are alone.
Of passion and of intellect
Suspect
Neither bird nor tree
Of vicious privacy--
Nothing is intimate.
Birds without rest
Must blackly test
Each branch with every claw they lack.
And trees alone
Are tough as thrones
With too much sovereignty.

Above your branches every hot black dove
Protests his love
And gathers in great swarms
As darkness comes.
They wait
Until the darkness make
Them dream-birds, black
As needles and as ultimate.
As you branch blanketed in royalty,
Each lacking claw, bird-real,
Will find its way
Throughout your naked branches,
Make you feel
Birds in the bed
Locking their claws against
Your privacy.

ALL HALLOWS EVE

Bring on the pumpkin colored wine.
The ghosts of autumn ask our pardon--
The withered flowers in the garden,
The fruit that frosted on the vine:
Each fickle life that testified
The summer' s quick magnificence
Now masks its own indifference
And plays the spook to salve our pride.
They wear bright costumes of the dead
And posture in a clownish way.
The lover that we loved last May
Now wears a gaping pumpkin head.
Our flowers and our lovers all
Implore us from the icy streets
And every painted spook repeats
The gestures of his burial.
Come drink the wine and watch them play
For there is nothing to be said.
No exorcist can drive way
The childish faces of the dead.

AT A PARTY

I watched the lovers falling in the dark
Like heavy autumn leaves upon a lake.
They were so very slow it almost seemed
that every color had belonged to them.
Bright shirts and bursting jeans by candlelight
Flickered and fell apart. Then it was late
The bottom of the water had been touched
Love' s limit reached, and every color lost.

A NIGHT IN FOUR PARTS

Part I: Going to sleep.

While the heart twists
On a cold bed
Without sleep,
Under the hot light
Of an angry moon
A cat leaps.
The cat prowls
Into cold places,
But the heart stays
Where the blood is.

Part II: Light sleeping

Down in the world
Where the cat prowls
Heart's manikin,
His climbing doll,
Prepares for love:
Spawns eye, spawns mouth
Spawns throat, spawns genitals
Heart is so monstrous naked that the world recoils,
Shakes like a ladder,
Spits like a cat,
Disappears.

Part III: Wet Dream

Downward it plunges through the walls of flesh;
Heart falls
Through lakes and caverns under sleep
Deep like an Orpheus.
A beating mandoline
Plucking the plectrum of the moon upon its strings,
It sings, it sings, it sings.
It sing, "Restore, restore, Eurydice to life.
"Oh, take the husband or return the wife."
It sings still deeper, conjures by its spell
Eurydice, the alley-cat of hell.
"Meow, meow, Eurydice's not dead.

"Oh, find a crosseyed tomcat for my bed."
Too late, too late, it was too late he fell
The sounds of singing and the sounds of Hell
Become a swarm of angry orange flies
And naked Orpheus, moon-shriveled, dies
And rises leaving lost Eurydice.
His heart falls upward toward humanity
Howling and half-awake.

IV: Waking

Heart wakes,
Twists like a cat on hot bricks
Beating off sunlight.
Now the heart slinks back to the blood
And the day starts.
Then the blood asks:
"Who was that lover
That thrashed you around last night?"
And the heart can't answer.

ORPHEUS AFTER EURYDICE

Then I, a singer and a hunter, fished
In streams too deep for love.
A god grew there, a god grew there
A wet and weblike god grew there.
Mella, mella peto
In medio flumine.
His flesh is honey and his bones are made
Of brown, brown sugar and he is a god
He is a god.
I know he is a god.
Mella, mella peto
In medio flumine.
Drink wine, I sang, drink cold red wine,
Grow liquid, spread yourself.
Oh bruise yourself, intoxicate yourself,
Dilute yourself.
You want to web the rivers of the world.
You want to glue the tides together with yourself.
You look so innocent--
Water wouldn't melt in your mouth.
I looked and saw him weep a honey tear.
I, Orpheus, had raised a water god
That wept a honey tear.
Mella, mella peto
In medio flumine.

ORPHEUS IN HELL

When he first brought his music into hell
He was absurdly confident. Even over the noise
of the shapeless fire.
And the juke-box groaning of the damned
Some of them would hear him. In the upper world
He had forced the stones to listen.
It wasn't quite the same. And the people
he remembered
Weren't quite the same either. He began
looking at faces
Wondering if all of hell was without music.
He tried an old song but pain
Was screaming on the jukebox and the bright fire
Was pelting away the face and he heard a voice saying,
"Orpheus."

----------He was at the entrance again
And a little three-headed dog was barking at him.
Later he would remember those dead voices
And call them Eurydice.

ORPHEUS' SONG TO APOLLO

You, Apollo,
Have yoked your horse
To the wrong sun.
You have picked the wrong flower.
Breaking a branch of impossible
Greenstemmed hyacinth
You have found thorns and postulated a rose.
Sometimes we were almost like lovers
(As the sun almost touches the earth at sunset)
But,
At touch,
The horse lept like an ax
Into another orbit of roses, roses.
Perhaps
If the moon were made of cold green cheese,
I could call you Diana.
Perhaps,
If a knife could peel that rosy rind
It would find you virgin as a star,
Too hot to move.
Nevertheless,
This is almost goodbye.
You,
Fool Apollo,
Stick
Your extra roses somewhere where they' ll keep.
I like your aspiration
But the sky' s too deep
For fornication.

We find the body difficult to speak,
The face too hard to hear through.
We find that eyes in kissing stammer
And that heaving groins
Babble like idiots.
Sex is an ache of mouth. The squeak
Our bodies make
When they rub mouths against each other
Trying to talk.
Like silent little children we embrace
Aching together.
And love is emptiness of ear. As cure
We put a face against our ear
And listen to it as we would a shell,
Soothed by its roar.
We find the body difficult and speak
Across its walls like strangers.

THE SONG OF THE BIRD IN THE LOINS

A swallow whispers in my loins
So I can neither lie or stand
And I can never sleep again
Unless I whisper you his song:

"Deep in a well," he whispers. "Deep
As diamonds washed beneath the stone
I wait and whisper endlessly
Imprisoned in a well of flesh.

"At night he sometimes sleeps and dreams.
At night he sometimes does not hear my voice.
How can I would you with my well of sound
If he can sleep and dream beneath its wounds?

"I whisper to you through his lips.
He is my cage, you are my source of song.
I whisper to you through a well of stone.
Listen at night and you will hear him sing:

"'A swallow whispers in my loins
So I can neither lie or stand
And I can never sleep again
Unless I whisper you this song.'"

ON READING LAST YEAR'S LOVE POEMS

The heart's a sprinting thing and hammers fast.
The word is slow and rigid in its pace.
But, if they part once, they must meet at last
As when the rabbit and the tortoise race.
Words follow heartbeats, arrogant and slow
As if they had forever in their load,
As if the race were won, as if they go
To meet a dying rabbit on the road.
Then, step by step, the words become their own.
The turtle creeps ahead to win the prize.
But, ah, the sweeter touch, the quicker boon
Is lost forever when the rabbit dies.

WATCHING A TV BOXING MATCH IN OCTOBER

The boxers show an equilibrium
Unmatched this autumn. In the air outside
Winds swirl around the big October moon
While men and boxers seek a place to hide
Within the focus of a crowded screen
The boxers face each other. They pretend
That can counterpunch real enemies.
They hit each other til the very end.
One wins and they embrace there while the wind
Grows louder and the screen begins to fade.
Then all the men and boxers bind their wounds
Behind an empty screen, and are afraid.

THE DAY FIVE THOUSAND FISH DIED ALONG THE CHARLES RIVER

And when the fish come in to die
They slap their heads against the rocks until they float
Downstream on one dead eye. From rocks
The Irish boys yell and throw rocks at them and
beat them with sticks.
Gulls wheel in the fine sky. Tall as an ogre
God walks among the rocks. His angels cry,
"Yell and throw rocks at them and beat them
with sticks!"
But watch those upturned eyes
That gleam like God's own candles in the sun. Nothing
Deserves to live.

A HERON FOR MRS. ALTROCCHI

Blue-rooted heron standing in the lake
Standing in unguessed song: like me no traveler.
Taking unsinging rest, loose-winged water-bird,
And dumb with music like the lake is dumb.
I stand upon the water-front, like him no traveler,
Pink-rooted, dangling on my flightless wings.
Aching for flight, for swan-sung voyagings,
I wait that final thrust and take my rest.
They will not hunt us with snares and with arrows.
The flesh of the water-bird is tough and is dumb.
The sound of an arrow, the sight of a hunter,
Only reminds us of life without wings.
Then, let us die, for death alone is motion
And death alone can make these herons fly.
Though still and wingless, we will cross an ocean
On throats too huge for silence when we die.

SONG FOR THE GREAT MOTHER

One minute after midnight, Mrs. Doom
From the middle distance of another room,
Begins to take the furniture apart
And close the drawers, and slam the windows shut.
She puts away each angry, loving sight
We left behind us or had heard or touched.
She rolls the carpet up on which we danced
Sweeps up the dust, then sighs and snaps the light.
And if we sleep, she whispers round our beds
And buzzes at the corners of our eyes,
Snapping each dream with hungry murmuring.
Oh, who will take this devil for his bride?
Nothing is changed by her. All things remain
As beautiful and angry as they were.
She brings the message that our eyes are blind
And will be blind, and blind, will disappear.

SONG FOR BIRD AND MYSELF

I am dissatisfied with my poetry.
I am dissatisfied with my sex life.
I am dissatisfied with the angels I believe in.
    Neo-classical like Bird,
    Distrusting the reality
    of every note.
    Half-real
    We blow the sentence pure and real
    Like chewing angels.

"Listen, Bird, why do we have to sit here dying
In a half-furnished room?
The rest of the combo
Is safe in houses
Blowing bird-brained Dixieland,
How warm and free they are. What right
Music."
    "Man,
    We
    Can't stay away from the sounds.
    We're crazy, Jack
    We gotta stay here 'til
    They come and get us."

Neo-classical like Bird.
Once two birds got into the Rare Book Room.
Miss Swift said,
"Don't
Call a custodian
Put crumbs on the outside of the window
Let them
Come outside."
                Neo-classical
The soft line strains
Not to be neo-classical.
But Miss Swift went to lunch. They
Called a custodian.
Four came.
Armed like Myrmidons, they
Killed the birds.
Miss Munsterberg

Who was the first
American translator of Rilke
Said
"Suppose one of them
Had been the Holy Ghost."
Miss Swift,
Who was back from lunch,
Said
"Which."

But the poem isn't over.
It keeps going
Long after everybody
Has settled down comfortably into laughter.
The bastards
On the other side of the paper
Keep laughing.
LISTEN.
STOP LAUGHING.
THE POEM ISN'T OVER. Butterflies.
I knew there would be butterflies
For butterflies represent the lost soul
Represent the way the wind wanders
Represent the bodies
We only clasp in the middle of a poem.
See, the stars have faded.
There are only butterflies.
Listen to
The terrible sound of their wings moving.
Listen,
The poem isn't over.

Have you ever wrestled with a bird,
You idiotic reader?
Jacob wrestled with an angel.
(I remind you of the image)
Or a butterfly
Have you ever wrestled with a single butterfly?
Sex is no longer important.
Colors take the form of wings. Words
Have got to be said.
A butterfly,
A bird,
Planted at the heart of being afraid of dying.
Blow,
Bird,
Blow,
Be,

Neo-classical.
Let the wings say
What the wings mean
Terrible and pure.

The horse
In Cocteau
Is an neo-classical an idea as one can manage.
Writes all our poetry for us
Is Gertrude Stein
Is God
Is the needle for which
God help us
There is no substitute
Or the Ace of Swords
When you are telling a fortune
Who tells death.
Or the Jack of Hearts
Whose gypsy fortune we clasp
In the middle of a poem.

"And are we angels, Bird?"
"That's what we're trying to tell 'em, Jack
There aren't any angels except when
You and me blow 'em."

So Bird and I sing
Outside your window
So Bird and I die
Outside your window.
This is the wonderful world of Dixieland
Deny
The bloody motherfucking Holy Ghost.
This is the end of the poem.
You can start laughing, you bastards. This is
The end of the poem.

A POEM TO THE READER OF THE POEM

I throw a naked eagle in your throat
I dreamed last night
That I was wrestling with you on the mountainside.
An eagle had a dream over our heads.
We threw rocks at him.
I dreamed last night--
This is false in any poem.
Last night never happened
Couldn' t
Make you hear the poem so quickly
That I could tell you what I dreamed last night
That I could tell you that I dreamed I was wrestling
With the reader of this poem.
Dreamed
Was it a wet dream?
Or dry like a dream is
When boys in a dream throw rocks at it.
I heard myself sobbing in a wet dream.
Don' t worry, I will tell you everything.
I had a dream last night
That I was wrestling with you on the mountainside.
Was it a wet dream?
No, I would tell you if it was a wet dream.
It was this poem
Us
I wrestled with you in this poem
And it was not a wet dream.

Then define
If you don' t want to scare him out of the poem
Define
The dream
The wrestling
The lie
And in
What sweet Christ' s name the eagle we were
    throwing rocks at was
And why I love you so much
And why it was not a wet dream.
I can' t deny
The lie.

The eagle was
God or Charles Olson
The eagle was men wrestling naked
Without the hope of men wrestling naked.
The eagle was a wet dream.

But the eagle in my throat says, "Jack
How can you write a poem to the reader of a poem?
Even in a dream you must love somebody."
This is another lie.
I did not wrestle with anybody
I wrestled with the reader of this poem.
Men kiss men
Not like anybody
Kisses a girl
Kiss each other like a map of Africa
Or a picture of a desert
Or a scale map of the entire universe.
But this is not a wet dream.
We did not kiss each other.
My darling, if you flew
A naked eagle in my throat
I' d shout, "Exactly.
When I said this was a poem to the reader
I wanted to dig a pitfall
Only you could fall into.
You
Know who you are
Know how terribly far
From last night you are.
If I am old when you read this,
If I am dead when you read this,
Darling, darling, darling,
It was last night
When I wrestled with you.
It was not a wet dream or you would be wrestling
With a naked gravestone."
Take it simply
Suppose we had been exploring
The hills and canyons of hell
And wrestled
And fucked
And -- Hell
Nothing but a spoiled camping trip.
Wrestling! It was as if we were in a room full
Of faceless comedians.

That was not what I wanted to say. I wanted

to tell you
That there is innocence too
And the blind grandeur
Of the face of a mountain
In all we would have surveyed
If it had been a wet dream
If we had travelled
Mapless, past what either of us knew
Past the dead eagle
Past the faceless comedians
Who bug us,
Past the past that had misplaced us,
Past all the dead lines in the poem that after all
Are only dead lines in a poem,
To the mountains
Where our hearts are
Where the heart is.
A wet dream,
I'll tell God,
It was a wet dream.

FIVE WORDS FOR JOE DUNN ON HIS 22ND BIRTHDAY

I shall give you five words for your birthday.

The first is anthropos
Who celebrates birthdays.
He is withered and tough and blind, babbler
Of old wars and dead beauty.
He is there for the calmness of your heart as the days race
And the wars are lost and the roses wither.
No enemy can strike you that he has not defeated.
No beauty can die in your heart that he will not remember.

The second word is andros
Who is proud of his gender,
Wears it like a gamecock, erects it
Through the midnight of time
Like a birthday candle.
He will give you wisdom like a Fool
Hidden in the loins
Crying out against the inelegance
Of all that is not sacred.

The third word is eros
Who will cling to you every birthnight
Bringing your heart substance.
Whomever you touch will love you,
Will feel the cling of His touch upon you
Like sunlight scattered over an ancient mirror.

The fourth word is thanatos, the black belly
That eats birthdays.
I do not give you thanatos. I bring you a word to call Him
Thanatos, devourer of young men, heart-biter, bone-licker.
Look, He slinks away when you name Him.
Name Him! Thanatos.

The last word is agape,
The dancer that puts birthdays in motion.
She is there to lead words.
Counter to everything, She makes words
Circle around Her. Words dance.
See them. Anthropos ageless,

Andros made virgin, Eros unmirrored
Thanatos devoured.
Agape, Agape, ring-mistress,
Love
That comes from beyond birthdays,
That makes poetry
And moves stars.

A PRAYER FOR PVT. GRAHAM MACKINTOSH ON HALLOWEEN

Infernal warlocks dressed in pink
And children wearing masks by night,
Protect my friend from sundry harms
And rest his body in your arms.

Ghosts of eternal silences
And pumpkinfaces wreathed in flame,
Consume the military flesh
Of those who borrow young men' s lives.

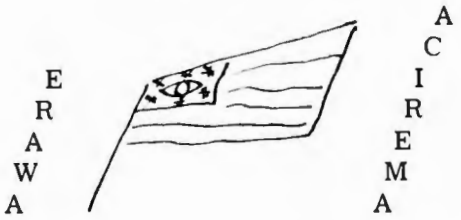
You white-faced boys who trick or treat
And ring the doorbells of the dead,
Twist out each patriotic bone
Of those who consummate the loan.

And have the nasty little girls
Who steal the seed from dead men' s loins
Make peepee on their uniforms
And dance on their conscripted flag.

Avenge for him this Hallowseve
Each moment of captivity.
Let every ghost of liberty
Parade before him in his sleep.

Infernal warlocks dressed in pink
And children wearing masks by night,
Protect my friend from sundry harm
And rest his body in your arms.

Jack Spicer: LETTERS TO GRAHAM MACKINTOSH



Vol 1
No 1

Call Your FBI Oct. 13, 1954

MARTIANS DEMAND RELEASE MACINTOSH

Washington, oct. 12

In a terse ultimatum delivered today, the Martian Commonwealth demanded that Graham Macintosh be released from captivity. " Failure to release our citizen from your pluto-terrestrial concentration camp will necessarily lead to interplanetary reprisals, " part of the note read. This was understood in Washington to be a reference to the United States Army.

President Eisenhower, contacted in his Augusta, Ga. golf course was quoted as saying, " I' m heartbroken. What' s good for General Motors ought to be good for Martians."

CITIZENS HOLD PROTEST MEETING

San Francisco, Oct 12

Three prominent San Francisco citizens today held an indignation meeting

Ben Langton, chairman of the group, said that they would continue to hold the meeting until their demands were met.

RACE RIOT FLAMES IN S. F. TAVERN

San Francisco Oct. 12

A brief but bitter race riot flared today in Vesuvio' s.

The riot is believed to have been caused by the fact that a Negro came in with a Negro woman.

Sports Page

Philadelphia Athletics
Sold to Jack Spicer
Philadelphia, Oct. 12

The American League today ok'd the reported $5,000,000 sale of the Philadelphia Athletics to Jack Spicer.

Greta Garbo Comments
On Macintosh Case
Cairo, Ill. Oct. 13

Greta Garbo today released her opinion on the late, controversial imprisonment of Graham Macintosh.

"I love you," she said.

ANTHOLOGY OF MODERN POETRY I

After great pain a formal feeling comes--
The nerves sit ceremonious like tombs;
The stiff heart questions-was it He that bore?
And yesterday - or centuries before?

The feet mechanical go round
A wooden way,
Of ground or air of Ought
Regardless grown;
A quartz contentment like a stone.

This is the hour of lead
Remembered if outlived
As freezing persons recollect
The snow--
First chill, then stupor, then
The letting go.

-- Emily Dickinson, 1880

(3)

LIVES of the Poets

* *

By John Spreadeagle

I Emily Dickinson

She was a New England virgin of about forty when she started writing born the same year that Lizzie Borden was. She was supposed to have been in love with a minister in her town that went away, but a recent writer has claimed that she was a repressed Lesbian. At any rate she didn' t have much fun. They discovered her better poetry thirty years after she died.

The way to read her poetry is to feel the emotion that each line suggests and then let them run in sequence like a movie camera.

This poem is supposed to have been written shortly after the minister (who must have been a woman) left town.

M O V I E

C O L U M N

"Doctor Kildare Rapes Andy Hardy" Premiere Hollywood, Oct. 13

Special to Aware America

Doctor Kildare Rapes Andy Hardy in glorious technicolor opened last night at the Grauman' s Chinese Theatre. This 3-D version of the famous stage play was attended last night by greats of radio, stage, and screen.

It was hard to pick a single scene in this glittering star-studded performance that did not move the audience. Perhaps the most sensational was the scene when Marilyn Monroe (the nurse) was pleading to both Doctor Kildare and Andy Hardy not to leave her alone in a field of buttercups.

Miss Monroe lives in Hollywood.

ANDRE BRETON
ANSWERS A QUESTION
Paris, Oct. 12

"Do you ever dream about Hitler?"

"No."

End of Belgian Section

ART NEWS

* * ** *

By special correspondent
To Aware America
Some kinds of birds fall in the love.

* * * *

Ben Langton, noted cafe-society raconteur, provides an inspiring example to all those men now in the service. In spite of hardship, in spite of pain, he made the best of the service. He may be scarred, he may be legless and armless, but the army still remembers him. Where is the man today who can follow his example?

JOKE

P-K4 P-K4

ARCHAIC GREEK NOVEL
FOUND IN LAVATORY
North Beach, Oct 13

An archaic Greek novel was found in the basement lavatory of the California School of Fine Arts, a local art school. Police say that it was the property of Graham Macintosh, a sculptor. Mr. Macintosh at present is on a leave of abscence school authorities disclosed.

PHONE YOUR FBI

R I D

D L E

Why does a rabbit have more babies than a swan? How would you like to fuck in a tree!

STOP PRESS

A communication was just (Oct. 13) received from the celebrated prisoner G. Macintosh. A letter will be mailed Friday (Oct 15) answering it. The Spicer service to concentration camp victims will continue on its Monday, Wednesday, Friday schedule.

Monday Oct 18

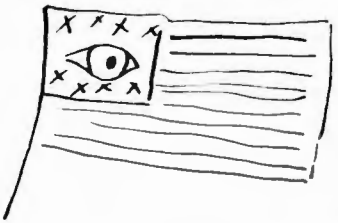
Dear Mac,

I' m sitting here on my couch wondering what to say to you. I could tell you about how my bathroom floor is getting squashy - water oozes up from it at odd moments - there must be a lake under the linoleum. I won' t tell you about all the hassle of getting the gallery going - I have to think and talk about it most of the day now. Those are the only two things of importance in my life now - except writing to you.

I think that when you get free again /however long that may be/, the first thing I' d like to do with you /is go to a/ desert - A Southern California type desert with the horizon blocked off on one side with funny colored mountains and a trail winding through the /Joshua trees/ that seems to go on forever. It would be /different/ than that burned forest we saw and fifferent from that violent ocean you pulled the /turtle/ out of - but different like a different side of endlessness. I can see the trail winding up to the /funny/ colored mountains (when we get there we will find nothing on them but rattlesnakes and tangles of greasewood) and past the funny colored mountains for as many miles as we can believe. And the /strangeness/ of night there with the stars looking like they' re chipped out of something. We will make a fire then. I know how to make greasewood burn.

This sort of daydream is fun. I' ll have to write other letters about other places we' ll be going when they' ve finished with you. I could spend years inventing landscapes for you to walk in.

Yours
Jack

A W A R E  A M E R I C A

Oct. 20, 1954 Call your FBI. Vol 1 no 2

E I S E N H O W E R D E N I E S M A R T I A N C H A R G E S I N M A C I N T O S H C A S E

IKE SAYS M' INTOSH IS GOVT PROPERTY

Washington, Oct 18

President Eisenhower today sharply answered the recent Martian ultimatum in a statement released today.

" The so-called Graham Macintosh that the Martian ultimatum calls a ' prisoner' is in reality a government owned robot, X-56254645, developed at our secret laboratories in San Francisco", President Eisenhower said in an offical statement.

Eisenhower admitted that Martian confusion was not unnatural. " All of our experimental models look human," Ike said, grinning at the reporters.

The Martin ambassador has already left Washington and Martian reaction to the statement could not be learned.

Notice to Army Censor

It has come to our attention that an issue of Aware America was confiscated by an officious officer. This is an illegal abridgement of freedom of the press. Any further attempts in this direction will be met by legal action. Aware America will call the F. B. I.

SPICER BUYS STANFORD TEAM

Palo Alto, Oct. 20

Wealthy Chicago millionaire Jack Spicer who has week purchased the Philadelphia Athletics today purchased the Stanford football team which lost to U. C. L. A. 72-0 last Saturday. He expects to combine the two, Spicer said.

EDITORIALS

WE LIKE IKE

President Eisenhower's inspired handling of the Macintosh case proves again that we should elect a Republican congress this November. Let the reader imagine what the Democrats would have done about Macintosh. Elect a Republican congress and keep our robots out of the grasping hands of Martian intellectuals.

* * * * *

FOOD For Thought

Eating too little food causes Bohemianism and Communism. Look how thin Bohemians and Communists are! Remember your duty as a patriotic American citizen, remember your duty to your ivy-covered grandmother, remember your duty to the Cleveland Indians. Eat twice as much and be twice as American.

ANTHOLOGY OF MODERN POETRY
2

Piazza Piece

---I am a gentleman in a dustcoat trying
To make you hear. Your ears are soft and small
And listen to an old man not at all;
They want the young men's whispering and sighing.
But see the roses on your trellis dying
And hear the spectral singing of the moon--
For I must have my lovely lady soon.
I am a gentleman in a dustcoat trying.

---I am a lady young in beauty waiting
Until my true love comes, and then we kiss.
But what gray man among the vines is this
Whose words are dry and faint as in a dream?
Back from my trellis, sir, before I scream!
I am a lady young in beauty waiting.

- John Crowe Ransom
1925

LIVES of the Poets -2

John Crowe Ransom

He was a wonderful poet in the twenties, became a university professor and editor of Kenyon Review in the thirties and never wrote a decent poem again. He had (and has) no sex life to speak of. This goes to show that there are other dangers for the artist than war.

The way to read this poem (and most of his) is not to let the deceptive skill hypnotise you into not hearing the poem. The problem is the same with Vermeer, a Dutch painter that I showed in the history class that you seldom attended.

He's a Southerner and Southerners are all stark crazy and end badly--highbrow and lowbrow alike. Others like him -but not as good- are Allen Tate and Robert Penn Warren.

LITERARY NEWS

* * * * * *

Joseph Bordle, a free-lance writer told us today the story of how he got an article published in Readers Digest.

"I wrote this article, see," Bordle said, "and sent it to Readers Digest. They sent me back a letter saying: 'Dear Mr. Bordle, We liked your article very much but we feel your title 'I Fucked A Bear' is not quite what we want.'

"So I tried again. This time they sent me a letter saying: "Your new title 'I Fucked A Bear for the FBI' is certainly an improvement but it is still not quite what we want.'

"So I tried a third time. This time I received a letter saying: 'Dear Mr. Bordle: Readers Digest encloses $5,000 for your story "I Fucked A Bear For The FBI And Found God'"

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Aware America:
I don't see why you make so much of a fuss about Graham Macintosh.
Pvt. David Schine

Dear Aware America:
Your readers may be interested in a new discovery I have made. If you drink three gallons of water (ordinary tap water will do) you will have mystical experiences. This will take your mind off Graham Macintosh, unless you happen to be Graham Macintosh.
Ben Langton

Dear Aware America:
I read your recent article 'Is Father Divine God?' with great interest, but I do not feel at the moment I would care to reply to it.
God

Dear Aware America:
I was misquoted in your last issue. What I said was, "I love you, I love you, I love you."
Greta Garbo

Friday, Oct. 22

Dear Mac,

I sometimes wonder when you receive these letters. Do they come the next day? What time do you get to read them? When do you find time to write you might tell me. It would make things seem realer if I knew you would be reading this letter at a particular time.

I met a famous poet this week, W. H. Auden at a friend's house. We talked for three hours about the Oz books (which Auden hadn't read). That night I had a dream that I had mailed a whole set of Oz books down to you at Fort Ord and was in trouble with the military. Perhaps I should.

Oz would be a very nice place for us to go after you get out of the army. It's difficult to find, of course. People generally get there by accident. It's surrounded on all sides by the Deadly Desert and you need magic or wings to fly over it. We will avoid Emerald City when we get there. Dorthy and Oxma are stuffy and boring and the hotel accomodations there are terrible. I think a quiet walking trip in the Munchkin country would be best to start out with.

But if magic worked, you wouldn't be down there reading this letter.

Yours
Jack

Monday, Oct. 25

Dear Mac,

My ashtray just fell over spilling cigarette butts all over the floor. Sort of a symbol. It's hard to believe that friends can be separated into such different lives - the headachy chaos imposed on mine, the straightjacket efficiency imposed on yours - and only a month ago we were playing chess and none of this had happened.

I like to think of chess as an ideal for both of us - there is just enough chaos and just enough order, just enough passion and just enough desparation, all limited into a pattern that will fit human beings - a pattern of sixty four squares. When we return to the chessboard there will be no more marching and making of beds for you, no more losing and finding of poetry for me, we will be human beings again moving our selves across a board that has definite limits and allows for laughter.

And allows for laughter. I haven't really laughed since you left. I've made laughing noises with half a hundred people I've tried to use in one way or another in connection with the gallery, but I haven't really laughed. You were one of the few people I ever knew that I could really laught with. Our chessboard.

Now I go back to the chaos of unprepared preparations for the gallery and you, after reading this letter, go back to some straightjacket task that your captors have devised for you. Chessboards are hard to find and are easily upset and are difficult not to remember.

Yours
Jack

Sunday
Oct. 31

Dear Mac,

I have a favor to ask of you. Please write your letters in blood as the ink washes off when I've cried into them for a week and besides Dick Tracy could do something with them then to prove scientifically from the amount of dried adrenalin that you aren't something I've been imagining and that I'll see you again. You keep seeming realer to me the longer you're away and that's a bad sign. Maybe Graham Macintosh is only all the poems I'm going to write.

The gallery is opening today. I couldn't care less. I'm going to bring a piece of paper down there and have people write gallery opening messages for you. This is the only way I know to make the opening hold any interest for me.

I need some of that courage that I was advising for you yesterday.

Yours
Jack

Later: I decided not to collect the messages. Everything was too chaotic. The opening is a big success. Hundreds of people drinking vin rose. My poem for you is up on the wall. I wish you were up on the wall so I could climb up there with you.

Yours
Jack

(Nov. 6, 7?)

Dear Mac.

This is the first day of rain and the emptiness, the accidie that has blunted all my feelings (even the feeling of pain) for the last few days has now, thank God, disappeared. Everybody's life, I think, is punctuated by these periods in which nothing can be done, no plan can be executed successfully, no hope can rise above the surface to become a plan. It is as if we each carry a private weather inside us and if we could predict and understand these cycles, relax our will on the days of accedic smog and save our energy and imagination until that rain which always comes drives the smog of impotent discontent away (very much as a good poker player just puts in his ante until his run of bad luck is over and saves his cash to bet heavily when his run of good luck starts) we would control our weather and house our lives economically. But instead most of us waste our hopes in the smog and have little left to fight with then the period of clear weather follows the rain. I think if we learned how to control ourselves in our private weathers, you could beat anything - even the army, I could beat anything - even missing you.

The rain outside on the window (but then the thought occurs to me that the rain must be an enemy to you marching soaked with it, trying to do things while it prevents you from doing them - treat it as a friend, it despises colonels and splashes mud on generals - it will be our symbol of what comes just before freedom) the rain, as I was saying reminds me of Southern California. I would listen to it rain all night and hope as I watched the rain slash at the window of the breakfast nook in the morning that there would be enough rain for a flood and school would be closed.

There often was. I'd sit home and listen on the radio to reports of all the cars and busses that were buried in water, of the man who was swept down the Glendale stormdrain screaming, of the rumor that Hollywood dam was about to burst.

So, as soon as you are lucky enough to win your freedom, there is another thing we will do. We will go down to Southern California and watch a flood. We will watch it as lucky spectators who do not need a flood to wash away the results of their own weather but are glad enough to have it happen for the sake of other people. And maybe this time Hollywood Dam will really burst - from our joy.

Yours
Jack

Weds Nov. 10

Dear Mac,

After that lyrical letter about rain the inevitable happened - that night I had to walk home from North Beach in a driving rainstorm. That's the trouble about being a poet - you have to pick your symbols and risk getting stuck with them.

I loved you note on the poems. I think my answer to it will come when I send you the notes for a speech I'm going to make. Werewolf, one of the new instructors, has a Friday discussion group at school and wants me to make a speech to them on poetry. It will really be a speech to you but none of them will know it.

The Gallery is beginning to be a pain in the ass. I've discovered that all the business about recording poetry etc. was a trick to get myself back to writing poetry again and now I'm doing that (more than partly due to you) the Gallery is just something that keeps me from doing things I should be doing. It' s very much like paying in installments for a dinner you've already eaten.

Duncan, the only poet around here who is better than I am, is going to Majorca (an island a hundred miles off the coast of Spain where you can rent a ten-room house for five dollars a month which is full of ruined castles - the island not the house) and so I've decided that you and I will go there to visit him - after robbing a few banks. You could make wonderful freeform sculptures out of the ruined castles and wonderful freeform shortstories out of the goats. (I'm sure there are goats - all islands are full of them.) We will play chess on the beach with degenerate European aristocrats and snub all cathedrals. So pack your suntan lotion and get out of the army.

Yours
Jack

Wed. Nov 17

Dear Mac,

The nice Mr. Frankenstein wrote a full column about The 6 today on the editorial page of the Chronicle. He approves of us heartily. To quote him at one point, "The poetry displayed is by Jack Spicer, and while it is outside my province, it struck me as notably skillful and very rich in content, but the visual comments thereon which hung next to the manuscripts were almost uniformly feeble, not to say embarrassing." Secretly, of course, I agree with him.

I've sent you another paperback. (If you don't get time to read them now, save them up for when you go to the hospital.) This book gives, in exaggerated Middle European form, the formula for the only successful method for an unlucky individual to beat the state machine - Schweikism. If an orange behaves like a piece of chewing gum while going through the juicer, the machine is likely to stop. If enough oranges behave this way, the machine is likely to break down. This is the only kind of anarchism that makes any sense. Martyrdom does not impress machines; chewing gum does.

You may have wondered while being a captive audience to my political / sermons?/ what sort of a world I would like to live in. (I say a captive audience because people who were born when you were have been carefully trained to disassociate their personal situation from their political situation and you are not likely to be interested inthe political implications of your personal struggle at Fort Ord.) The world I would like to see would not be a world of anarchy but a world of very small governments, not one world but one hundred thousand worlds. If San Francisco and Oakland were independent states having a cold war with each other, it would be easy to decide whether you wanted to be a citizen soldier for San Francisco or whether you wanted to slip across the city limits to the independent city of San Bruno and fight, if necessary, for them. You could choose your government and your war and not be stuck with the government and war you were born with.

I write to you politically and miss you personally.

Yours
Jack

Sunday Nov. 21

Dear Mac,

This time you will have a Monday letter even if it's not a very long one -- and I'm going to try writing on only one side of the page. Maybe you won't have to use cellophane.

I didn't sleep very well last night. I kept waking up thinking that I had heard you screaming in your sleep. About six thirty I woke up from a dream where I was accidentally taken into the army because I visited you and was refusing to obey a captain unless he let me call my lawyer. From then on until I got up it was dreams like that.

The sun is unnaturally bright today. It looks like a warm January day in Los Angeles. I think we'll go down to L.A. together this New Years and watch the Rose Parade together and the Rose Bowl Game. We'll watch it over television of course -- I think in a little bar in one of the foothills of the San Gabriel Mountains. Between halves you'll tell me that you never really believed it would happen, but by that time the second half of the game will seem more important than the nightmare that by now only belongs to the past. And U.S.C. will win with an upsurge of touchdowns in the second half. But of that I'm not quite so sure.

No I have to go down to the gallery and squabble with the rest of the directors about this goof, that display of temperament, and how the gallery will pay next month's rent -- but my mind and my heart will stay at New Years for the whole afternoon, helped out by the fact that I have a convincing New Years type hangover.

Yours
Jack

Monday Nov. 22

Dear Mac,

You have probably heard that the governor of Iowa was assasinated last night by Puerto Rican Nationalists. (I heard the news on the radio at The Place. I may have misheard what the announcer said.) This obviously represents a new political technique -- terrorism crossed with Dada. My head is buzzing with plans for a practical application of this technique to our own politics.

It will be easy to recruit an organization of Californian Nationalists. California was once an independent nation and the bear flag that used to represent it can still be seen on some flagpoles. When California is again free, her young men will be free of conscription by the U. S. government, her population will be free of fears of the atom bomb (both Russia and the U. S. will be trying to woo her, like Yugoslavia, and will send her great gifts of food and money), and, although I hate to think of Goodwin Knight as our first president, she will have, in a few years, a reasonable and peaceful government.

The terrorist arm of the California Nationalists will be called The Dirty Golden Bears. They will specialize in Dada assasinations and sabotage. No one will know who will be killed next - it may be the mayor of Walnut Creek, it may be the Swedish Ambassador, it may be the Ohio State quarterback in the Rose Bowl game. Special attention will be given to chalking "Yanks go home" on the headquarters of all army posts. The Dirty Golden Bears will drive the Americans out of California and restore our freedom.

As a special feature of the next two weeks (you will need extra inspiration in your efforts to recruit for the Californian Nationalists in Company K) I am sending a letter every day instead of the usual schedule. I'm afraid this will tend to make the quality of the letters pretty thin, but perhaps I'll be able to rise to the occasion.

I can imagine you reading this letter now in the semi-darkness, tired and discouraged. Let me put a hand on your shoulder and wish you good luck - and courage.

Yours
Jack

(Nov.)

Dear Mac,

New paper, a new doubletime schedule, only, alas, no new pen. Writing to you daily, if only for two critical weeks, makes life seem somehow white and open as ths paper is now.

It is probably snowing in Minneapolis, now as you are reading the letter, and the California darkness which surrounds you while you read the letter is utterly different than the black and white darkness outside of the windows in Minneapolis where neither of us can see it. A comforting thought, and somehow less lonely, that there are millions of sights at this moment that neither of us are seeing and yet which, with freedom and gentle fortune, we may still see together. I will give you a snowing night in Minnesota that you can see in your intervals between pain and discomfort during the day, a night into which you can escape for a few seconds, a cold snowing beautiful night.

It is the night before Thanksgiving (like your tonight is) and it has been snowing for several days. It is not the whiteness that one sees now but the few patches of color that the whiteness almost covers and accidently emphasizes. We are on a train sitting together looking out of the window. The ice on the window makes it hard to see, but we can see the pattern of ice and snow and darkness. The train is going slowly as if it intended to go on forever.

We will stop at one of the small towns and my uncle will be at the station to meet us with his old car and he'll be bundled up in three overcoats, whiter and older than ever. The train is already four hours behind schedule and it is likely to be two in the morning before we get there. Then Thanksgiving dinner tomorrow and a visit to the family graveyard.

You will probably never have seen it snow in a family graveyard under gold gray skies on Thanksgiving day. My father's grave is there -- they airmailed his ashes from Los Angeles after he was cremated. My grandfather's grave -- he was gored to death by a bull when my father was very young. My uncle's grave is there too, that is why he could never have been there to meet the train, bundled up in three overcoats. It is impossible to imagine how cold and how silent a family graveyard is on Thanksgiving day with the wind blowing off a frozen lake that lies to the west where the ground rises.

So I give you all this to remember this Thanksgiving -- the trainride through the blackness and the snow, the old town where the Spicer family has always had its graveyard, the thought that even this would be pleasant if we were doing it this evening, that even strange ghosts can be shared by friends.

Yours
Jack

Friday, Nov. 26

Dear Mac,

Thanksgiving was as ghastly as I suspected it would be. Some twenty old Bohemians and young sat around a table at the Place and ate a conventional Thanksgiving dinner. The comments and remarks were surprisingly conventional too, as if no one could quite believe that this wasn't a family Thanksgiving dinner. Everybody seemed a little relieved when the dinner was over. Even when I was a kid Thanksgiving never seemed to be a real holiday to me. It was more a reminder that the calendar was half-way between Halloween and Christmas. Christmas! If you're out by Christmas, I'll believe in holidays again.

After dinner was over I had to keep the gallery open. Through most of the evening I read a 17th century Portugese epic poem called the Lusiads by Cammoens. It is the weirdest thing I've read for a long while. It is about the Portugese voyages of exploration around Africa to India but involves the Roman gods. Venus was Vasco da Gama to get to India and Bacchus doesn't. Jupiter is neutral. Bacchus does things like getting the Mohammedans to attack their ships. Apollo had just appeared on a suspicious errand in Madagascar when I had to close the Gallery.

In spite of the crazy mixture of the ancient gods and the unexplored, the poem is food for a hundred dreams. Imagine the magnificance of such voyages - not to know how big the world is and how many islands it has. Imagine if we had both been drafted by the Portugese Navy to sail around the Cape of Good Hope, to discover the secrets of the islands of the Indian ocean, to find, in time, a passage to India. Your training would make sense then. A bayonet could be used against unicorns or hippogrifs or treacherous Mohammedans sent by Bacchus. You would try to improve in your rifle practice so that you could protect us from the pgymies waiting in ambush for us in the trees. We would both become generals in the army of Prester John. A world like that would be worth fighting for, a world that had no maps.

I make the same point I have made before. It is not the Army I object to but the kind of army, not killing I object to but the kind of killing. They have given us danger without adventure, labor without reward, pain without dignity. They have wiped out the treacherous Mohammedans with their H-Bombs and killed the unicorns with flame-throwers. They have made maps of every square inch of the world and imprisoned us inside those maps.

Lets escape.

Yours
Jack

Thursday, Dec. 2

Dear Mac,

My toe is still mutinous, but, while it refuses to move and obstinately remains purple, it does not seem to have affected the rest of my body much by its subversion. The only other news is that there was a bomb scare at the School last night (an anonymous telephone warning that a bomb was planted somewhere and would blow up in fifteen minutes) and students, faculty, and models posed for photographers on the sidewalk while fifteen policemen searched the building. Most people suspect that Ernest Mundt pulled the hoax himself (free publicity), but you must consider yourself lucky that you have so good an alibi. Perhaps I should try a similar hoax on Fort Ord. It would take so many days to search it that they might discharge all of you in despair.

I am reading Proust for the emteenth time and am more than considerably impressed. The whole book consists not only of what he is able to remember but actually to evoke from the past and the process of this evocation leads the reader to do likewise with his own past so that the reader is soon not only reading a novel but (in a passive way) writing a novel and for every page he reads there is a ghostly page the reader recovers from his own life. It is the nearest thing to a time machine that I am likely to see.

Proust's method for summoning up absolutely forgotten fragments of the past (or rather almost literally revisiting them) is to concentrate on some sight, some smell, some taste in the present and let it ride him back on its similarity to something forgotten. It is a time machine with no controls on it unfortunately -- one cannot tell if one is going to go back a day or fifteen years, whether one is going to arrive in a meadow or a jungle -- but it is an exciting trip. Such a vast majority of our lives we have never once remembered; it sits like an iceberg under the surface of our minds and only the small cap of the tip rises above the surface. Perhaps, in these last torturous days of basic training, you might like to try this time machine in moments of boredom, exhaustion, or terror. When you are marching, for example, let the smell of dust send you back to a section of the past you have never visited (it was present when you were there before); in bayonet drill let the sharpness of the light on the bayonet's edge send you back to another place in the past. This may be the only certain way to defeat the army. They can't defeat you from ten years ago.

Past, present, or future, don't forget that I'm thinking about you and am

Yours
Jack

Friday Dec 10

Dear Mac,

I had a rather odd dream last night. You and I were on a walking tour somewhere on the east coast of Italy and were in a town from which, looking to the south down the coast, I could see a cove with a small beach and beyond that a promontary and another town larger than the one we were in which I, at the time, incorrectly identified as Naples. There were several buildings of interest in the town we were in -- one of them, a cathedral, looked rather like a large New England church and the other, which was next to it, was a small building with an inscription in German on the front. You asked me what the inscription meant and I, after puzzling at it for a minute, told you that it meant German Corpse House and that it was obviously a monument for German strangers that had died in the town. We walked in and through a sort of hallway very quickly, but I could see that the hallway was covered with paintings. Then we came to a glass and chromium type office and past that an auditorium. I could see that down on the stage people dressed like doctors were slicing corpses into pieces and hanging up the pieces like butchers hang beef. Just as I was looking the nurse came up to us, very angry, and told us we should not have come in without signing the book. I was frightened and so we decided to leave. On the way out I noticed that the paintings on the hall were children' s paintings.

The reason I tell the dream at such length is that it had the kind of clearness (sharpness of focus) that dreams don' t usually have. I can still see that town and the view past the town. I wonder if dreams can be made of a jumble of memories of the future as well as the past. What I mean is this -- perhaps if I had had the dream five years from now I would have been able to say to you -- oh yes, the town was that town we walked through and I mixed it up with the morgue we visited in Vienna and the children' s art exhibit we saw five years ago at The Place. This mixing of past and future in dreams may be why we recognize a piece of landscape or an event that we have never seen before - the puzzled "but I' ve been there," "but I' ve done that" feeling.

Look through your own dreams for pieces of the future--they' ll be mixed with crap from the past and present. Maybe you' ll see the German Corpse House too.

Yours
Jack

Saturday, Dec. 11

Dear Mac,

I've just received your letter, for which God be praised, but, as seems usually to happen, am to be robbed of a chance of answering it by the fact that you'll probably be here today. A couple of things though in case you aren't able to come --1) please send me your new military address as I don't trust the tender mercies of the army postoffice, 2) think how well comparitively you've done -- you've forced the basketball game (we're changing sports now) into an overtime - this is exactly what Ben Langton, high-scoring guard for Peoria, did in the final round of the N.C.A.A. tournament. He went on to win the game and the tournament, and exactly with that two point spread the gamblers paid him for.

Talking about basketball reminds me of one of the weirdest experiences of my life. When I was a kid I used to like to watch the semi-pro games that were being played around the neighoorhood. You didn't have to pay any money to see them and they were a pretty good brand of basketball. The good seats in the gym would always be occupied by the cheering section of the companies that were playing and I would always cheer for the side I was sitting on. This time the cheering section I sat in was filled almost to overflowing. The game had already started and I had trouble finding a seat. Soon I began to notice that the people around me weren't cheering. Their team was slightly ahead in a close exciting game and the people on the other side were screaming their lungs out everytime their team made a basket, but the people on my side were silent as a grave when our team did - they would move their hands in a funny way but never open their mouths. It was a really scary experience being the only cheering person in a sea of silence. It was only at half-time that I discovered the reason - the team I was cheering for was the Los Angeles Silents and they and their cheering section were all deaf-mutes.

So the Saturday letters have turned to basketball. Very little in California shows the passage of the year except sports. If it were the east, winter would be shown by the snow on the ground and the dead of most vegetation. Here it is only shown by the basketball games and the end of the last college football game. I hope you will be free long before baseball.

Yours
Jack

Monday Dec. 13

Dear Mac,

When you entered the cafeteria yesterday I was more frightened than if you had knocked on my door Saturday dragging the dead body of someone you had murdered behind you. In the latter case I could have discussed the disposal of the body (burying it in my garden perhaps) without any panic and arranged an alibi for you, but since, instead, you were where you shouldn't be - a few hours late to base with a choice of several good excuses, I was beside myself with fear. Thinking about it afterwards I realized that this was because I had an abnormal fear myself of being late to anything, a fear as real as the fear of heights or the fear of enclosed places, and I was projecting this fear into your life.

This train of thought leads me to some more general and interesting conclusions. When there is a deep bond of affection between two people, they, in a sense, lead each other's life as well as their own and this complicates the problem of fear enormously--rather like Siamese twins one part of whom has a deadly fear of high places and the other part of whom likes to dance on parapets. I think every human has about the same number of fears, but how different the fears are! And the most confusing part of it is that it's almost impossible to tell what you're not afraid of since what you're not afraid of is something that you can't conceive of anybody really being afraid of. And when the strong bonds of affection come in - the mother who is in terror of death by speed who goes through the agonies of the damned when she knows that her son is out driving drunk and fast late at night. She cannot, in her heart, realize that her son is not afraid. The son, in turn, when the mother is in bed dying slowly of some painful disease, suffers agonies she never would have thought of suffering. He cannot understand that she is not afraid of death by disease. The bonds of affection, then, can double our fear. We can go through not only our fear but the other person's.

Obviously there is a better solution. It should not be up to the one person to stop giving cause for fear, it should be up to the other to stop being afraid. The bonds of affection then, if both parties involved adopted this as a policy, would eventually lead to the loss of all the fears that the two people didn't share.

What an abstract letter! I'm afraid you'll be bored.

Yours
Jack

Weds, Dec. 15

Dear Mac,

This is the second chapter about fear. I' m not quite sure why the subject seems important enough for two letters at this crucial time. Perhaps it' s because fear is a natural force, like electricity, which can either spread terror and destroy, in form of lightning, or can be channeled into high tension wires and used to make toast. To give a single example-- Jim Jurkovitch, the crazy Cal half-back of the early forties, used to run like the hounds of hell were after him. I am sure he thought they literally were. He used fear, consciously or unconsciously, to make long runs that no one else could have made. Of course later he cracked up... But the point is, if you understood the mechanisms of your fears, you could use this knowledge, not to get rid of your fears, but to make the fears help you obtain anything you wanted to obtain. It' s very much like what the magician does when he draws a pentacle and conjures up a demon. The demon, the fear, imprisoned in the magic pentacle of the will, can be forced to work wonders. So fear, and my reasons for exploring its nature with you.

A good example of how a fear can be, not overcome but imprisoned in a pentacle, is my fear of the supernatural. Even up to my early adolescence I used to be afraid to go to sleep because I would dream about ghosts - chasing me and singing in weird voices, things like that. I think that at thr time if I answered honestly what I was the most afraid of it would have been ghosts rather than death. But I discovered that fear of the supernatural could be used in poetry and magic (if these things are different) and could give me a kind of contact with things outside of myself. Now when a ghost comes into a dream I am still afraid, but I use that fear to force the ghost to tell me something. Last night, for the first time in months, I had one of those dreams. I was telling fortunes on a complicated kind of board. Should I use a kaleidoscope, I thought? No, I should use dice. Every time I shook the dice there was a semi-human scream of something in pain outside the window. Shaking the dice was doing it. I was glad the other people in the room could hear the screams because sometimes they couldn' t The door opened and a little old woman came in and said, "You are hurting my master." Unfortunately I woke up there, but all through the dream I had the feeling - this is interesting. I' m making contact with something.

Am I sounding like Ben? Will finish with fear tomorrow.

Yours
Jack

Friday, Dec. 17

Dear Mac,

There' s an item in the paper today that says that a professor at Michigan State was fired for announcing that he had received word that there would be a great upheaval Tuesday (he angrily denied to reporters that he had predicted the end of the world) especially in the Great Lakes region and the result of it might be the emergence of the lost continents of Mu and Atlantis- presumably in the middle of Lake Michigan. What made the university authorities especially angry was that he claimed to have received this information from extra-terrestial sources - and this after President Eisenhower told a press conference this week that he did not believe in flying saucers.

I report this to you partly because I doubt that the story got into the Army Times and partly because it' s interesting to speculate what Atlantis will look like when it reemerges--other, this is, than being very wet. (Another sudden thought comes to me here -- would Atlantis be asked to join the United Nations? Would Chaing Kai Shek move his forces from Formosa to Mu? An idea for a science fiction story which we' ll colaborate on as soon as you get out of the army).

What would we find on Atlantis? Easter Island type sculpture or Graham Macintosh type sculptures? Vast cavernous temples or millions or rows of salt-corroded pre-fabricated houses - each with a plastic Christmas tree in its window. Perhaps we would find an exact replica of the United States with everything in it preserved in the attitude it had when the first upheaval broke -- an Atlantean Graham Macintosh cleaning a latrine, one hand forzen in the air - an Atlantean Jack Spicer writing a letter to this Atlantean Graham Macintosh (the letter is so soaked with seawater that it is hard to read it, but it is sure to end with Yours) - an Atlantean General Wright picking his nose. And the giant crabs and the strange fish of the deep have been watching these frozen figures for countless centuries wondering why they were there and what they were doing.

I suppose there' s no hope your getting out of the army by Tuesday so we can be frozen in the new Atlantis playing chess together as the sea rises. Besides it will be either Tuesday or Wednesday that I go down to Los Angeles. (I' ll be back Sunday or Monday.) This is an insane world where islands emerge and disappear, but, if you keep your courage and your hope, we will yet find an island where no army and no sea water can touch us

If you mail me a letter after Sunday, better send it to Hotel Stillwell, 9th & Grand Ave, Los Angeles.

Yours
Jack

Friday, Dec. 31

Dear Mac,

It's 1955 for you and it's still 1954 for me. In a way that's a worse kind of seaparation than 100 miles or army vs. civilian. A year (especially at the end of it) seems as individual as a planet, and we are not in the same year. Worse than a planet for no space ship could cross back from 1955 to 1954 bearing Pvt. Graham Macintosh home on leave to the year he left. There is nothing to do then but to follow you - so I'll travel through the next few hours, ring a cowbell at midnight - and cross over into your year.

If I could pick a place to spend that midnight (or the next midnight that will separate 1955 from 1956), I wonder where I would choose? New York in Times Square where almost a million people gather in the space of a few square blocks and watch the new year come in with unamazed eyes and then take the subway somewhere and drink. (We could go down afterwards to Greenwich Village where everyone is sad on New Years and the streets are full by 3 AM of drunks that are crying and our feet would crunch the light layer of fresh snow on the pavement.) Or in the mountains somewhere, having put our Geiger counters aside for the evening, break open a few bottles of champagne around a fire which smells of pine and greasewood and wonder what hour was midnight and when we should have wished each other happy new year. Or -- but you can supply these yourself if you say over and over again in a loud voice, "Yes, Virginia, there is a Happy New Year." And perhaps, oh perhaps, Graham, there is.

Otherwise get a discharge from 1955 and come back to 1954 with me. I'll meet you in June.

Yours

Jack

Wed, Jan. 5

Dear Mac,

The English little magazine Horizon used to carry a series of articles during the last war called "Where Should John Go?" Each month, during the invasion threat and the subsequent bombings, this article would discuss a new place that it would be fun to go to, completely and utterly ignoring the fact that there was a war on. These articles were the most popular thing that Horizon ever printed. I' m telling you this in justification of another imaginary trip that I' ve planned for us.

This is a beer trip. It will be financed by a New York publisher to whom we have sold the idea that we should write a book a la Duncan Hines about the beers of America in their native habitats. There are over a thousand local beers in the United States, some sold only within ten miles of their breweries, some sold throughout the state they are made in. It would be a long arduous trip - but imagine drinking Red Wing Beer in Mancato, Minnesota, Iron City Beer in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, Sicks Beer in Seattle, Greasydick Beer (pronounced exactly as you would expect - I didn' t believe it either until I heard it myself) in Fulton, Missouri, Crystal Beer (made in Havana) in Key West, Florida. The book would be a big success and the publisher would send us out to write a sequel on the beers of Europe.

This all sounds so improbable today. People aren' t supposed to wander anymore. As soon as they reach the age to enjoy life they are supposed to spend two years in the army and then go home and immediately marry a nice girl and have babies and television sets. If they don' t want to do this they have to spend their lives in the vast Bohemian Reservations of North Beach or Greenwich Village where they can do nobody any harm. In the Middle Ages things were much different. Scholars, artists, poets, orators were always on the move. Only fools stayed in the same town for more than a few weeks. If things were like that in the U. S. today how wonderful it would be. In the course of our trip we' d see Ben who at the moment was court painter for the Duke of Memphis, run into John in Texas where he was writing heroic poems for the Count of El Paso. Bohemia would be dispersed throughout the country and both it and the country would be healthier for it.

Yours
Jack

Monday, Jan. 11

Dear Mac,

Recently I have begun to wish that I could start writing to you in another language - some of the words I still most want to use have grown tired for us in our correspondance, words like "courage" etc, and merely are empty ghosts of what they used to mean several months ago.

Words exhaust themselves while feelings don't - that is our greatest tragedy (to paraphrase Proust who said it about the heart changing - which it, unfortunately and singularly doesn't). The word "courage" means something real when it is first used. When it is used for the twentieth time it causes a vague and comfortable buzzing in the head - and nothing more. As I say what we need is a new language.

Of course the humorous and the unexpected often help bridge the gap, but one can't expect the Governor of Iowa to be assassinated by Puerto Rican nationalists every day (although I wish it were a daily ceremony in spite of its cost in Iowans and Puerto Ricans) and somehow it's self-defeating to come to expect the unexpected. Still, there is hope in such assassinations even after the word "hope" itself has become meaningless.

A thought just occured to me, one that seems to have little connections with what I've been saying but which thundered through my mind as if something had sent it there with a purpose, "NONSENSE IS A FORM OF MAGIC."

That's all for today except to tell you that I had a dream last night in which you enlisted in the Navy and were wearing a Navy uniform over an Army uniform when you came to visit me. You looked silly.

Yours

Jack

Wed. Jan 13

Dear Mac,

Enclosed is a copy of a letter I have written to Dag Hammersjold, Secretary General of the United Nations.

Dear Mr. Hammersjold: Now that you have returned from negotiating the release of the American airmen being held by China, I would like to ask your help in obtaining the release of a prisoner being held by the Americans -- Pvt. Graham Macintosh. This person is being held, not on the charge of espionage as was true of the Americans, but on the charge of being over 18 and in good health. (We can submit evidence that he is innocent of the latter charge.)

The Americans have given several conflicting explanations of their barbaric action. They have claimed that the massing of such prisoners in camps throughout the country affords the United States a protection against the Hydrogen Bomb. I can assure you that Graham Macintosh couldn't protect anybody against the Hydrogen Bomb. They go on to say that they may need him to use in a police action such as Indo China and Korea. I cannot see why they need anyone in such police actions as the boundaries always end up at the armistice the same as they were at the beginning of the police action. (A lot of time and effort could be saved by having the armistice commission itself fire the guns and not bothering to use soldiers at all.) The final reason they give for his imprisonment is that the massing of large numbers of prisoners will frighten the Russians into being peaceful. I can assure you that no Russian would ever be frightened of Graham Macintosh. Graham only frightens his best friends.

It is true that the United States plans to release Macintosh in several years but by then the horrible brainwashing which has already begun to affect him will have completed the job.

I have hesitated to write before because the favor I ask is out of your usual routine and they say you can't teach an old Dag new tricks, but you are my last hope. Come down to Fort Ord. Negotiate for me. Sincerely etc. Jack Spicer.

I'm sure that this letter will do the trick and you'll be out of the trenches by Easter. By the way, what is the word for brain-washing in Swedish?

Yours

Jack

Friday, Jan. 14

Dear Mac,

Just in case you haven't been reading the papers, I want to tell you the latest in the war between Nicaragua and Costa Rica. President Somoza of Nicaragua has challenged President Figueres of Costa Rica to a duel and President Figueres has replied that President Somoza is "as crazy as a goat in the midsummer sun." Two people have been killed since the Authentic Anti-Communist Revolutionary Army (I swear to God that's the name they use) invaded Costa Rica several days ago and took several important towns.

This is the kind of war one would be proud to fight in - a war that dada could win, not the frearíness of basic training and hydrogen bombs, but courage, humor, and imagination. When you get out let's raise an army in North Beach and go down and reconquer Costa Rica. (The Authentic Anti-Communist Revolutionary Army consists of only 150 men.) You can be general and I want to be delegate to the United Nations in the new government. Imagine the speeces I could make in the United Nations Assembly! After our government was stable we could invite prominent writers and scientists who were sick of the United States to become Costa Rican citizens. We could become the only sane nation in the whole world.

And what would happen when someone else started to invade us? I have a plan for that too. As soon as the invading force crossed the border we would go on the radio and announce that we had declared war on Ethiopia, Iceland, China, Formosa, and Greece. This would cause so many United Nations investigators and armistice commissions to fly to Costa Rica that there would be no room for the invaders to fight.

Arriba Costa Rica Libra!

Yours

Jack

Wednesday, Feb. 2

Dear Mac,

The prolog of my new play is finished and I' m in the middle of blocking out the scenes of the first act. I keep running into problems of trying to understand the character of Troilus, my hero. He was just s small kid when the siege of Troy started and his reactions to the war (and to everything else) are going to be different than those of the other Trojans, and the Greeks for that matter, who didn' t grow up with the war. It' s exactly the same problem that I have understanding people of your age who have had a war to look at ever since they started looking. There are definite effects and I thought you might be interested in what I think they are.

The first is an isolation from history and tradition. The war-child has to pick his joys and his symbols from the present. They must be able to fit in a travelling bag. Apollo and Aphrodite, St. Augustine, Chartes Cathedral, Napoleon are meaningful symbols to my contemporaries, as meaningful in their lives as the sculpture you found in the ocean is in yours, or the green man. To the war-child they are only names or things to memorise. The meaningful can only be in the present. That is why music is the art most popular with war-children. One can understand a piece of music without reference to the past, without reference to anything but the music itself. That is why poetry, the exact opposite of music, is least popular with war-children. They live, the most gifted and most sensitive of them, in two dimensions instead of three. They can' t dig time -- and this causes them to be more intense within the limits of their two dimensions than a three-dimensional person could possibly be.

The second is a lack of a sense of injustice. When a war-child is pushed around he bitches or he fights back but he has no real sense of indignation. You might as well be indignant about the rain, he thinks. You can show him concentration camps, the torture of thousands, the monstrous villanies of his leaders and he will believe you but look surprised that you bothered to mention them. Evil and injustice seem a natural part of his world. He tries to avoid them, as you would dangerous animals, but they excite him neither to pity or terror.

These letters to you are beginning to sound like a journal or a diary. It' s your own fault. If I don' t see you or hear from you for a month or so, how can I help writing letters to myself.

Yours

Jack

Friday, Feb. 4

Dear Mac,

The damndest unlucky things keep happening to me. Yesterday I lost the prologue to my play. I was going to the bank and had the notebook with the prologue in it with me. When I got to the bank, it wasn't. I walked back and forth the mile or so I had gone looking for the notebook, but some helpful person had evidently picked it up. It's not too serious because I remember almost everything that was in it, but it's quite a drag. That would be one nice thing about being a painter. One would be hardly likely to drop a canvas without knowing it.

The shit-war has entered a new phase. President Eisenhower, after challenging a nation of four hundred million people to war and hearing them accept the challenge, has decided to cut the military budget further and the Secretary of State has gone on a vacation. If only the Russians and Chinese Communists would accuse us of lunacy instead of agression before the U.N., I'm sure they would have the whole world with them. Can't you imagine Molotov getting up and saying, "I'm sorry I ever accused the United States of deep-laid Wall Street imperialist plots. It's obvious to me now that the men who direct U.S. policy wouldn't be capable of finding Wall Street on a subway. When an individual begins to behave so peculiarly that he is a danger to himself and his fellows, he is declared incompetent and placed in a rest home under psychiatric treatment. Couldn't the same thing be done on a national level? I suggest that a United Nations Sanity Commission be formed and that any nation who becomes an agressor not through selfishness but through idiocy be examined by it." The United States and Nicaragua certainly would be the first customers.

Thank God I can go back to my Trojan War where the cause was ridiculous but kissable. I'd prefer Helen to Quemoy Island any day of the week.

Yours

Jack

Friday June 3

Dear Mac,

It' s too bad that Dave didn' t do what he did earlier. I think that if it had happened when you were in Ord, it might have given you not the courage but the focus to do what you wanted to do. Now you know a great deal more about yourself than you did before. You know that you always buy stretcher-bars at the moment you want to blow up a building, that you think about motorcycles when you want to destroy an army, that you are not a hero.

I suspect that the artist is never a hero. He is too easily persuaded to replace the gesture with the symbol, the resistance with the thought of resistance; to explode violently in a vacant-room - safe from consequences and safe from results. Certainly I have never been heroic (or, rather, all my heroism has been accidental - against my will - like a boy pushed into the water who is forced not to drown) and I know that I would have failed in exactly the way you failed and for, God help us both, approximately the same reasons.

Heros are boring though. I always say that a dead coward is better than a live hero. Heros stink until they get into their graves where they belong. They stink of action, of taking action seriously, and of limiting the focus of their lives to action. What will Dave do now he has gotten out of the army? He will have to rejoin it so he can get out of it again.

My revision of the play is now going well again. I won' t have it all revised by the time I leave for New York (around July 1st), but I' ll have most of it. That and a suitcase will be all I' ll have between myself and starvation.

Why don' t you try writing a few poems? (If you do, don' t use a typewriter to write them with). It might be a kick for you and I' m sure John Toilet wouldn' t object philosophically. Write a series of minute poems (a minute to write) suggested by each of the following words: kite, if, hope, flame, stick, violent, nose, yellow, stab, bathtub. Send me the results with a kind thought.

Yours

Jack

Jack Spicer:

PENTHEUS AND THE DANCERS

Sacred to the memory of Pentheus
and to the god that killed him

(Outside a gate of Thebes. The gate is in the middle of the stage but can swing open showing a backdrop of the town. The stage is empty when the curtain rises. Six maenads slowly enter from stage right; they are: Chorus, Anti-chorus, Drummer, Flutist, and two Dancers. They are dressed in black robes and wear faunskins and ivy. They arrange themselves slowly on the corner of the stage. N.B. whenever the maenads are alone in stage action, the lighting narrows down the stage to this corner.)

Chor: Here we are. Another city. It seems to me that I have spent my life dancing from city to city. (She goes over and tries the gates.) They are unlocked. This is the city with the unlocked gates.

Who is walking about inside the gates? Who is walking about on the streets of the city? They had better make way for us. They had better listen through their walls to us, silently and with proper purpose. Listen to the street singers from Asia, citizens of Thebes. (Flute and drum begin very softly. Dancers occasionally move. Chor. returns to place.) He, in his fortune, who receives this god' s mercy will abandon his life for that mercy and will contain it inside himself and the god will surround him. He will wear this god' s costume and dance in icy purity upon the mountain. He, in his fortune, who abandons his life to this god' s mercy will be his servant and will contain him forever.

(Dancers are now fully dancing.)

Go, dancers, bring back the god born of god. Carry him on your light along the mountains of Asia. Bring back the god born of god. Carry him on your light feet down the highways of Thrace. Bring back the holy child of god. Bring Dionysus home.

Anti: He was born here, in this city, aborted by fire: born in the smell of fire and burning flesh, five months in the womb.

It was Zeus then who received him, ripped him from the burning womb of his mother and contained him; it was Zeus that carried him in the coolness of his thighs.

And on the ninth month he was born. He was born without pain from the body of Zeus the father. A horned child and his head garlanded with gentle snakes.

(All the women now turn toward the gate. Some light focuses on it.)

Chor:
Now join us in our worship, city of the unlocked gate. Join us in our worship, deathplace of Semele. Garland your streets with ivy, disguise yourself with ivy, fatal city.

Branch out, branch out green, fair-fruited creepers. Join us with branches of your oaks and evergreens. Let every tree in your city make a green sacrifice to the god born of god.

Listen, citizens of Semele' s birthplace. Strip off your city clothes and assume our god' s garments. Put on his dappled faunskin with the hair braided for worship, the stiff crown of leaves, the flowering dress of ritual. Take up the thyrsus and strike the bright air with it. Give worship with the violent wand.

It will not be long before you dance. Our god is coming. It will not be long before you follow your wives and daughters to the mountain and dance. Listen, citizens of the unlocked gate, our god is coming.

(Musicians play.)

Anti: Listen to our god' s music, citizens of Thebes. Listen to our god' s music, citizens of the unlocked gate. He uses the same drum that the Corybantes used in the birthcave of Zeus on Mount Ida, the drum that frightens away the terrors of the night, the drum that deafens all enemies. He uses the same flute that shrills across the long deserts of Asia, the flute that makes the empty spaces blossom with music. He uses the flute that belongs to Rhea, to the great mother. Listen to our music, citizens of Thebes. Listen to our music, citizens of the unlocked gate.

(More and wilder music. Then Chorus no longer addresses Thebes but turns left towards the mountain.)

Chor: Dionysus will welcome the man who falls to the ground dressed in a blotched faunskin, who falls to the ground hunting the wild goat, hunting the delight of warm flesh devoured. Dionysus will welcome the man who falls satisfied to the ground. Dionysus will welcome the thirsty hunter.

The air is full of wine and honey. Dionysus lifts the blazing pinetorch high in the air. Fire trails from it as he runs along and his long hair streams behind him in the wind. He is calling us and we hear him.

Go, Dancers. Go, dancers. Like the rivers of Asia that run with gold,

sing Dionysus, sing sweet Dionysus. Let your drums sing, Dionysus, Dionysus is the lord of joy. And the flute climbs higher, each note of it climbs higher as you climb the mountain, sweet as an eagle as you climb the mountain, climbing as you climb the mountain.

In joy then, as a colt with her mare in the pasture, your body leaps and rests. In joy then, you are a dancer.

(There is a sudden silence and the gate slowly opens. Teiresias hobbles out, shortly afterwards to be followed by Cadmus. Teiresias is old and bearded and uses his thyrsus as a blind man's cane. Cadmus is just old. Both are wearing maenad's costumes.)

Teir (turning back to shout inside the gate): Cadmus, Cadmus, come look. I think they are outside the gate. (He speaks to the maenads that he isn't sure are really there) He is Cadmus, son of Agenor. He was the man who founded this city.

(Cadmus comes doddering in.)

Cad: Yes, it's them. (Aside) Do you suppose they understand Greek? (Aloud) This is going to be a great occasion. (Aside) I put on all the robes just as you said. You're a wise man, Teiresias, a wise man. (Aloud) This god is going to be a powerful god. Just think, he was Semele's son. In a way, I'm his grandfather. We must see that he has all our hospitality here. It's almost as if a favorite grandchild were coming home.

(Aside) Where are we supposed to dance? Do you think that we'd better go up to the mountain and dance with the rest of them? (Aloud) Explain this to me, Teiresias. You are as old as I am but always were wiser. Tell me where old men are supposed to go to dance. I don't think I'll ever get tired of stamping the earth with this thyrsus. Already I've forgotten I'm old.

Teir: Yes, Cadmus. Neither of us are old and both of us feel like dancing.

Cad: (trying to get Chor. to comment): Do you think it would be right to dance on the mountain with them?

Teir: It would be right.

Cad (turning): I'd better have them get a chariot ready so we can be there quickly.

Teir: No, that wouldn't be right. It wouldn't pay the god the same honor.

Cad: I'll lead you then, Teiresias. One old man will lead another old man.

Teir: Don't worry. The god will lead us both. We will walk without effort.

Cad: Isn't anyone else coming? Are we the only men in the city that are willing to dance in the god's honor?

Teir: We're the only sane men in the city.

Cad: We're waiting too long. I'll take your hand and we'll go.

Teir: Take it. A pair of old hands will join together.
(Cadmus takes hand, starts to go, and then looks nervously at Chor.)

Cad: I'm afraid of the gods. Even when I was a great hero I was always afraid of the gods.

Teir: There's no use talking about the gods. We've seen what they can do. We've seen their power since our childhood. No kind of thinking makes them any different. No man's foolish talking weakens them.

They're saying in the city that it's undignified for old men to go dancing, for a man without hair to cover his head with ivy. They say that we're a mockery of the god we are trying to worship. The men who say this are being foolish. The gods do not care who worships them; all humans are the same to them. They do not care whether the dancer is a beautiful youth or a toothless old man. To them all living things are dancers.

(Cadmus has been fidgeting during this speech and now turns Teiresias around smiling.)

Cad: I'll give you three guesses who's coming up the road. Come on, Teiresias, you're a prophet. (Teiresias doesn't answer.) It's Pentheus. It's Pentheus, my grandson, the new king of Thebes. He's coming to worship with us. We may not be many but we're the most important people of Thebes. The god is really going to have a good homecoming. (Pentheus enters stage left excited and angry.) He certainly looks upset. Has something happened, Pentheus?
(Pentheus ignores them and addresses this to the audience.)

Pen: I've been hearing strange rumors ever since I left the city. Now I find they're true. Most of the women of the town seem to have left their homes and gone following some wandering magician who's cooked up a new god for them to worship. Somebody just told me that they're all up on the mountain now, dancing around and doing what they call worshiping. The joke of it all is that they say this god with an Asiatic name--Dionsophos or something like that--is really the miscarriage Semele had a few years ago when she was struck by lightning. I've seen the women do strange things in the city but never anything quite as idiotic as this.

So they are dancing there in the dark forest, drunk with wine and god knows what else. You can imagine what happens after the dancing is over. They're so tired from their worship that I imagine the poor things just have to

creep into the bushes. There are a lot of bushes up there and I imagine there' s a man behind every bush. Worshipers of Dionysus, indeed. Whores for Aphrodite!

I' ve already caught a few of them and locked them up. The trouble is that all of the women are in on it, even my mother and all her sisters. I' ll hunt every one of them down from the mountain before I' m through. We' ll se if they do so much dancing when they' re wearing chains.

I don' t know very much about this magician they' re following except that he' s from Asia, of course, they always are, and is supposed to be beautiful. He has long flowing perfumed hair and wine-dark eyes, eyes that put women in heat at a glance, and he' s always around the dancers, dangling his mysteries of joy before them. I imagine he stays up on the mountain at night too.

If I get him inside these gates, he won' t shake his thyrsus anymore or mince with his long hair flowing in the wind--and his wine-dark eyes will close as the blood spurts up from his neck.

This is the gentleman that has them worshiping Semele' s abortion. He says that the holy foetus was knitted up in Zeus' thigh afterwards; unburned, of course, in spite of the fact that the fire completely destroyed Semele--destroyed her for her blasphemy as I am going to destroy him for his. He deserves a more hideous death than she had. (He notices Cadmus and Teiresias.) Good god, what' s that? Two old mules dressed as mares. (He turns and walks over to Cadmus, completely ignoring Teiresias.) Are you going on the stage, grandfather? (He takes hold of his dress.) You' d better take off that ivy. It doesn' t go well with your complexion. (Cadmus is tapping his thyrsus on the ground in an embarrassed way.) Don' t jiggle that thyrsus at me, grandfather. (Puts hand on his shoulder.) You were a hero once. Did you wear ivy then? Remember your position in this town. Come on back home with me. (Turns on Teiresias.) I suppose it was you who got him into this. A new god would be fine for you wouldn' t it? More birds, more burnt offerings, more profits. The more gods there are, the better you' d like it. You' re supposed to be a priest for Apollo, you know, instead of a pimp for every new god that comes out of Asia. If you weren' t so old and feeble, I' d lock you up with the rest of the women. You and that magician, trying to introduce Asiatic corruption into our city, trying to turn our women into prostitutes.

Chor. (not moving): You seem to have forgotten your respect for the gods and for your family. You were talking with contempt to the Cadmus who sowed a crop of warriors and reaped them long before you were whelped. He is your mother' s father. Either say the right thing or be silent.

Pen. (Pen. does not seem to hear what Chor. is saying, but notices the group during the speech. He goes over and ironically inspects the instruments and costumes of all the maenads.): I see the magician has company. (As he turns to leave the group he turns and tosses a coin on the drum.) Here' s a nickle,

grandma. Now, why don't you girls go off to some other city where they like foreign music better.

Teir: (Trying to get his attention): Pentheus, listen to me. You don't understand our actions or our motives. You're filled with a passion about things you don't understand and are trying to hide that passion with sneering jokes. And all this you call wisdom.

I had my doubts about the new god too at the start. Here was a god, evidently some local Asiatic god of wine--I didn't know then that he was Semele's son--being imported to Greece and raised to the level of Apollo, I was indignant too, although I know too much about the gods to shout insults at even the least of them--but, when the women started worshiping I determined at least to discourage them. Then I had a dream.

Pen: You seem to always have dreams when you want to get out of your duty.

Teir: Then I had a dream. I don't know whether Apollo sent it or Dionysus himself, but it was one of those dreams that was so clearly magical that I knew I wasn't dreaming it by myself even while I was dreaming.

There was a black jar filled with sand and all the gods were standing around it weeping. I couldn't understand why they were weeping but I knew they were weeping with good reason. Then Zeus appeared carrying with him a white jar of the same size filled with dark purple wine. He poured all of the wine into the black jar that was filled with sand and none of it overflowed. Then ivy leaves began growing out of the black jar and the gods began singing.

Pen: It sounds like an awful waste of good wine.

Teir: That was the dream, Pentheus, a foolishness to mockers but transparent to those who believe in the power of the gods. Now for the sake of Thebes and for the safety of the house of Cadmus, grant me permission to explain the dream to you.

Pen: I can see there's a long speech coming. I hope it explains why our women should be allowed to go off to the mountain panting like bitches in heat.

Teir: Just as in the dream there were two basic and opposite substances in the jars, so there are in the universe--wine and sand--wetness and dryness. These things are basic. They are at the source of everything.

Dryness is first. Just as in the dream the first thing that appeared was the black jar of sand. Dryness is the goddess Demeter--She is the earth and is called by other names and black is her color. She is spread throughout the universe and feeds all things with dry foods.

Wetness is second. Just as in the dream the second thing that appeared

was the white jar of wine. Wetness is the god Dionysus--He is everything that is not earth but which mixes with earth and white is his color, the color of the snow on the mountain. He feeds us sleep, he feeds us an ending to the earth' s dryness, he feeds us sleep as a sweet medicine for sorrow.

He, being wine, is more than a god. He is poured out on the altars of other gods, poured out, drop by drop, so that the gods will always give happiness to mankind. As it says in one of the Orphic songs, "He is the god who enters the wills of the gods."

And he was stitched into the thigh of Zeus. You laugh at that, don' t you? What is the thigh of Zeus but the broad, unburning sky, the sky that is full of white, wet clouds that have the s hapes of animals and gods? It was there that Zeus protected Semele' s sons from the wrath of Hera.

You have implied that I' m being unfaithful to Apollo, the god that I serve in my prophecy. Apollo is not too proud to use the power of Dionysus. To be a priest of Apollo and prophecy a man needs to be mantic. To be mantic a man needs mania, to be seized by the sudden wonder of a god invading him. Dionysus is the god of mania. All gods use him in their prophecy.

Even Mars, the god who guards this city, even he uses Dionysus. What general does not know of a time in the middle of an easy battle when his army suddenly panics, scattering like pigeons before the shadow of a hawk. Dionysus is the god of panic. All the gods use him to create fear.

Listen to me, Pentheus. Don' t be so sure that force is the only thing that makes things happen among people. You have a thought and that thought is a passion. Don' t be so sure that that passionate thought is giving you wisdom. Receive this god into your land and pour libations for him and wear his garlands on your head.

Pen. (clapping his hands): A good recruiting speech for a whorehouse.

Teir: Dionysus has nothing to do with chastity. He doesn' t hate it or love it. Those women who are chaste receive purity and remain chaste; those women who are whores receive purity and remain whores. This god can be worshipped through the heart or through the loins. All worship is equally welcome.

This god is like a king. You are glad when the crowds stand at the gates and cheer you. I' ve never seen you pick an unchaste woman out of the crowd and refuse to let her cheer you. Dionysus is the same.

So Cadmus and I will wreathe our heads with ivy while you mock at us. We will be a toothless grey-haired couple while we dance and you will howl curses at us. We will be undignified and foolish and a shame to Thebes, but we will not be fighting against a god.

You, Pentheus, are so drunk that no wine can sober you; you are so poisoned that you cannot be cured by drugs.

Chor: Old man, you are wise. You have shown reverence for Dionysus without dishonoring Apollo.

Cad: (putting his hand on Pentheus' shoulder):
You ought to cool down and think about what Teiresias has said to you. Our family has never gained its power by being angry. We've always managed to stay inside the limits of good traditions and not to offend anything that is more powerful than we are. Cool your temper down and think about this thing practically.

What if you don't think he's a god? If people say that he's a god, they will say that Semele is the mother of a god and will give honor to all our family. You're always worrying about the safety of the city. Think how this would strengthen our position.

Actaeon was another grandson of mine. You saw what happened to him when he challenged Artemis. His own hounds tore him apart--and remember that this happened on the same mountain where the new god is dancing.

Be smart, Pentheus. Let me garland your head with ivy. It is a small honor that you have to pay.

Pen. (as Cadmus tries to put the ivy garland on his head):
Don't touch me. Go out and be any kind of old fool you want to but don't wipe your hands on me. (Turns and shakes Teiresias.) You. You're the one who's hypnotized this old man into all this nonsense. (Goes through gate shouting.) Guard! Guard! (Long pause.) (Then words heard from off stage.) Send a couple of men to Teiresias' house. Tell them to scatter everything they see there. Knock over his birdcages and throw all his fortunetelling equipment in a pile in the middle of the floor. I want to teach him a lesson not to upset the decent order of things in Thebes.

Get a few men together yourself and go out and arrest that stranger from Asia that's been hanging around the city for the last few days, the babyfaced one. Have him chained and bring him back to me for questioning. (Comes through the gate back on the stage.) He wants us to dance, does he? I'll make him dance from the end of a rope.

Teir: Wicked ridiculous man, you don't even know what you're saying. The anger that you carry inside of you is turning into madness. Cadmus and I will pray to him for you and we will pray to him for the safety of the city of Thebes. (Turns) Hold on to me, Cadmus, and I will hold on to you. (As they walk slowly off stage.) I am afraid that Pentheus will mean pain to you and to the generations that follow you. I'm not talking in prophecy now but in my own wisdom. Madness begets madness and begets bitter sorrow. (Both exit.)

Chor: Holiness, you who are queen of the gods, Holiness, you who fly above the crust of the earth on golden wings, have you heard Pentheus? Have you heard what he said? Have you heard him violate the holiness of Dionysus? Have you heard his violence?

(Flute and drums play for a while. Then as the dancer begins.)

It is through our god that men dance; it is through our god that men worship every god with keen appetite, making themselves shout with the high-pitched flute, shout with the drum that beats without ceasing. It is through our god that men smile when they worship. He serves them their holy meal, the broad ivy-hung bowl filled with the cure of all sorrow. And then the dancers rest and drink from the black cup, and then their smiling becomes sleep.

Anti: Sorrow is the result of madness. Sorrow is the result of violence. Only silence and cunning will keep each man' s house from sorrow. The gods watch. The gods watch both violence and silence.

Intelligence is not true cunning. Thoughts that try to outwit the gods end only in violence. Such thoughts try to see too far and miss what is real and around them. Such, I think, are the ways of madness.

Chor: Take us to Cyprus, the small island of Aphrodite. All the Loves are there, all the Loves that hunt the hearts of mortals, on that rainless island bubbling with rivers.

Take us to Pieria, to the cold slope of Olympus; all the Loves are there, all the loves that rest the hearts of mortals. Dionysus, master, take us there where the Loves are lawful.

Anti: (as if she sees the soldier who will be entering at the end of the speech): This god loves Peace. He loves her because she is the goddess who gives abundance and lets the young live. To all humans, to the rich and to the hungry, he has given the delight of wine, the delight which is without grief. But he hates the man who will not care for these things--to live the life of blessedness day by day, and the nights without sorrow. It is wisdom to keep the heart and mind away from men of violence. It is wisdom to know and do as the rest of men have known and done.

(Soldier enters leading in Stranger.)

Soldier: Here' s your wild animal, Pentheus. I' m afraid he' s pretty tame. We didn' t even have to hunt for him. We just started out and there he was. When we walked forward to catch him, do you suppose he ran away into the bushes or snarled and showed his teeth? Not this one. He put his hand into my hand and let himself be led away like a pussy-cat. I felt pretty foolish saying "Stranger, I capture you in the name of Pentheus, king of Thebes," while all the time he was holding on to my hand.

There' s something funny going on in the city though. The dancers that you had jailed are all out of jail and dancing in the streets. They are saying that their master let them out, the one they call god.

And the chains are broken and the bolts of the doors are broken, and no numan hand could have shattered them--or at least they' re saying this in the city. This stranger either knows some good tricks or he' s brought a miracle or two with him. But the rest is your concern.

Pen: Well, let go of him, you idiot. If he doesn' t want to escape there' s no use holding on to him. (Looks the stranger up and down.) So, stranger, you' re quite impressive. You' ve got an Asiatic babyface. Beautiful, I guess. The kind women go for. Your hair' s a little bit too long and you certainly aren' t built like a wrestler. (Taking his arm.) Your skin is soft and pale as if it had never seen the sun. (Letting go.) Quite impassive! (Completely changing tone, sharply.) First tell me where you come from, stranger.

Str: I come from Asia.

Pen: And who sent you here?

Str: Dionysus, son of Zeus.

Pen: Is there some other Zeus in Asia who is always have new children?

Str.: No, this is the same Zeus that you know of. The same Zeus that was the lover of Semele.

Pen: Was it by day or night that you saw this Dionysus and he asked you to come here--or did he instruct you with an inner voice?

Str: I saw him face to face when he instructed me.

Pen: What sort of rites do you people have? What are they supposed to do for the worshipers?

Str: You are not allowed to know, and yet it would be worth knowing.

Pen: That' s a pretty obvious trick. I suppose it would work with a woman.

Str: I mean that a man who cannot dance will never be able to dance, and will always need to dance.

Pen: You say you saw the god face to face. What sort of a god was he?

Str: Of the sort he wanted to be. I had no control over it.

Pen: You certainly know how to answer without answering.

Str: I don' t think you know how to understand my cunning.

Pen: Is this the first place you' ve brought these rites to?

Str: All the nations of the world are dancing them.

Pen: In Greece, I mean. The barbarians do all sorts of idiotic things.

Str: In this case they are wiser.

Pen: Do you hold your ceremonies at night or by day?

Str: By night mostly. Night helps us remember the god more.

Pen: And have safer sex in the bushes.

Str: I' ve heard that men sometimes do evil things in the daylight.

Pen: You' re getting quite a pleasure out of showing your cleverness. I suppose you know you' ll be punished.

Str: And you will be punished.

Pen: How brave this mystery-priest is getting! How well he knows how to threaten!

Str: Tell me what punishment you' re going to give me.

Pen: First I' m going to cut off those pretty curls of yours.

Str: They are sacred and cannot be touched. I let them grow for a god.

Pen: And then I' ll have my servants break your thyrsus.

Str: Take it from me yourself. It belongs to a god and has two edges.

Pen: Then I' ll let you cool off in jail for a few years.

Str: My master is a locksmith. He can break chains and open doors. I' ll call him.

Pen: Will he hear you when you' re all alone, deep in the prison without any dancers?

Str: He is hearing me now.

Pen (looking all around, smiling): Where is he?

Str: Here. Where I am. You can't even see him.

Pen: All I can see is a cheap swindler clothing himself in high-sounding ambiguities. (Calls into gate.) You there, have this man bound and carried away. He has violated the laws of Thebes.

(Soldiers enter and stand on either side of stranger.)

Str: Do not bind me. I who have control say this to you who are without control.

Pen: And I who have authority again say--bind him!

Str: You don't know who you are or what you are doing or what your life is.

Pen: I am Pentheus, son of Agave and Echion, grandson of Cadmus.

Str: Pain.

Pen: (slaps his face): That's enough out of you, my Asiatic beauty. Lock him up in the stables for now. Let him dance among the horse turds if he wants to, or perhaps persuade them to worship with him. Orpheus made the trees move with his songs, perhaps this priest can make the horse turds dance. (The flute and drum have started at the slap and have been getting louder and louder.) And these noisy bitches you brought with you from Asia will be sold as slaves. A few whippings and they'll forget all the nonsense that you taught them.

Str: I am ready to go. I do not have to suffer anything I do not choose to suffer. You will. You will be mocked and punished by a god you don't believe.

(Lights on chorus as other exit.)

Chor: We are alone outside the gates of a strange city. I do not feel the god anywhere. What if Pentheus is right? What if you are foolish women wandering after a god that is no god? We are alone and the darkness does not answer us, only the whirr of the night-flying hawk and the small sound of a river in the distance.

Dirce, blessed river of Thebes, where Zeus himself washed the embryo of Dionysus, washed the embryo he had rescued from the electric fire, blessed Dirce, healer of Dionysus, hear us.

You were a witness when Zeus said, "Gently, doubleborn one, enter my thigh, enter my male womb. I will reveal you to Thebes, my doubleborn lover, and she will worship you by that name." You were a witness to this, why do you not proclaim it to Thebes?

Why do you scorn me? Why do you reject me? You told me that the time would come, the time would come as surely as the grape ripens on the vine,

when all Thebes would be my witness.

Anti: Anger, anger. What anger this earthchild shows, Pentheus, whose father was planted into the ground like a willow, breed of the old dragon. He is a wild monster, he fights against the gods like a giant. He will set me in slavery, chain me where I cannot dance, set me like my master in a dark prison. Son of Zeus, do you see your preachers wrestling against oppression? Come down from the mountains in the full terror of your godhead. Restrain the violence of this man. Restrain the violence of this son of dragons.

Chor: Where are you? Where are you? In the tangled brush of what mountains? Where are you dancing now? I can see him on the cold slope of Olympus, dancing in the moonlight, dancing where the songs of Orpheus still hover in the cold night air. That mountain was happy. Any place he dances will be happy.

Dionysus (a voice offstage): Listen, I am here.

Chor: Where are you? Who is here?

Dion: Listen. I am here.

Anti: Master, master.

Chor: Master, master.

(They join him from both sides. He is invisible to the audience. Nothing else can be seen in the darkness.)

Dion: The earth is shaking.

Chor: Soon the house of Pentheus will be falling.

Anti: Dionysus is walking in the house of Pentheus.

Chor: The marble is cracking. It has fallen. It has fallen.

Dion: The lightning burns, burns.

Chor: Look at the lightning fall from the tomb of Semele. Look at the lightning fall from the god' s mother.

Anti: Fall to the ground! (All prostrate themselves.) Our lord has made high things fall. Our lord has destroyed.

(Lights brighten and Stranger enters through gate.)

Str: What are you women doing down on the ground? All you' ve seen is that the god made a single palace fall. Get up and dance if you want to show him how he' s impressed you with his power.

Chor: You've escaped.

Str: Did you expect less? Don't tell me you didn't think I'd escape.

Anti: I was lonely. He put you into such powerful chains. Who would protect me if you weren't with me?

Str: There's no danger. There's never any danger. Those chains! He put them on a bull. (Laughs) You should have seen him. He got me into the stable and then, instead of chaining me, he sweated for half an hour trying to put the chains on a young bull. He finally succeeded too. He's a strong fellow!

I just sat there watching him and laughing when I heard him laughing. It was about then that the earthquake started, and the god kindled a sheet of fire just to keep things moving. Pentheus rushed around shouting, "Fire, fire!" seeing fire everywhere, I guess, and kept sending his slaves for more water to put it out with.

Then he thought of me again and rushed around with his sword drawn looking for me as if he knew I had escaped. Dionysus, to give him something to do, sent phantoms of me all over the courtyard and Pentheus ran about stabbing the bright air. It was just then that the earthquake was the heaviest and the main building of the palace collapsed. Pentheus saw it, looked back at the phantoms, and then let his sword fall to the ground.

So I went away leaving him there, but I think you'll hear his footsteps soon and he will come to meet us. After this, what will he say? It doesn't matter. I'll meet him with a calm smile even if he comes with thunder and lightning in his lungs.

Pen. (rushing out of gate first looks at women and then sees Stranger in midst of them): How did you get here? Guards! Guards!

Str: You're all out of breath.

Pen: Did someone let you out of those chains?

Str: Didn't I tell you someone would?

Pen: Who did? Try answering my questions directly for a change.

Str: The god that makes the grape grow.

Pen: The god that gives our women an excuse to make whores of themselves.

Str: The god who gives joy to women and to such men as believe him.

Pen: Bah. Dionysus, whoever he is, is better than that. You're just using

his as an excuse for your own twisted lusts.

Str: He needs no excuse from you. He is here now.

Pen: He is, huh? (Goes to gate and yells.) Close off all the gates to the city.

Str: Don't you think gods know how to climb walls?

Pen: Calm and sane. Calm and sane. Except at the times when you should have sanity and calmness.

Str: When I most need to be then I am most sane.
(Herdsman enters left.)

Str: If you pay attention to what he's about to tell you you will understand true sanity. Listen to him for a moment. I'll be waiting for you. (He walks away into the half shadows.)

Herd: Pentheus, master, lord of Thebes. I have just come from the mountain. It's still snowing there.

Pen: Well, go on. What's happening on the mountain?

Herd: The women have been wandering like wild mares on the mountain. Almost every day we see their white legs flashing in the snow. I came here to tell you... Is it all right for me to tell you perfectly frankly what I saw sir? I don't want you to be angry at me.

Pen: Tell everything. That babyfaced faker over there is the one I'm going to be angry at.

Herd: I was climbing up from the foothills a little after sunrise. The cattle were climbing with me, looking for pasture among the rocks. I came upon the women then, resting their heads on the needles of the pine forest. Three bands of them scattered over the pine forest, sleeping there naked and alone.

I called softly to the other herdsmen so they could see the sight--for we had never seen the women sleeping before and they joined me and we stood there watching at the edge of a clump of pines.

Then your mother sprang up from among them and called them to waken, for she had heard the noise our cattle were making in the early morning sun. And they jumped up as if they had never been asleep, all of them, young girls, wives, and old women.

First they let their hair fall loose down over their shoulders and then they put on their faunhides. Then thousands of snakes came out from the rocks and into the wet meadows and let the women coil them around their garments. The

snakes showed no terror. I saw one of them lick the cheek of the young girl that held him like a puppy.

Some whose breasts were still full held fauns or wolf-cubs in their arms and let them suck eagerly on the white milk.

As the sun began to drive shadows from the forest they gathered oak leaves and tendrils of ivy and made themselves garlands of them. One woman took her thyrsus and struck a dry boulder--water spurted from it in a clear stream. Another twisted her thyrsus into the black earth and the god sent up a blazing fountain of wine. Milk oozed from the ground wherever they scratched it and honey dropped from the tip of each thyrsus. If you' d been with me, King Pentheus, you would have been completely convinced of the power of this god.

All of us who had been watching were completely bewildered by what we had seen and decided that we' d better leave. Up the mountain we saw other herdsmen and told them about it. One of them, who had lived in the city for a while and knew more about politics than we did, told us that it was our duty to take your mother away from the rest of the women, and that, if we brought her back to you, it might please you and you might reward us. At the time this sounded right and so we went back and hid in the brush and watched the dancers gathering.

By now they had started to call upon the god. They called him Iaccus, lord of the screaming throat. They called on him together, all in one voice. And the mountains and the wild beasts screamed with them--and there was nothing on earth that did not move.

In the middle of all this Agave happened to dance by me and I saw my chance to catch her without any fuss. I grabbed at her and caught her arm as she came by. She twisted herself like a snake and broke my grip without even losing the rhythm of the dance. Then the fat was really in the fire. She called to the other dancers all the way down the forest, "Look," she cried, "look, my sword-toothed bitches, we are being hunted by men. Let' s show them how sharp a bitch' s tooth is."

Well, that did it. All of us broke our cover and ran as fast as we could. But they didn' t seem to want to catch us. They went after our cattle instead. I' ve never seen wolves do worse things than they did. I saw one tear the swollen udders off a heifer and then claw her in half through the belly. It looked like a slaughter house--guts and blood and splinters of bone strewn out among the pine cones. They even got the bulls. One minute they were standing with their horns lowered looking proud and stupid--and the next minute they' d been dragged down to the ground and their skin was being torn off by the hands of young girls.

Then, like birds that are flying so fast that they cannot stop, the women rushed toward the small villages in the foothills, places where those families live who grow wheat near the river, and they threw everything down--houses,

equipment, the barns, where the grain was stored. They carried children from their homes and trampled the wheat in the fields. All that they stole they balanced on their shoulders, bone-crushing weights, and still they kept dancing. They carried fire upon their hair and it did not burn them, and, when the men from the villages gathered to attack them and drive them off, no sword could wound them but their ivy thyrsoi cut their enemies like real swords.

Finally they returned to the forest they had started from and the streams of milk and rich wine were still flowing from the ground. They washed the blood from their hands in the mountain river and the snakes wiped clean with their tongues the little drops that had spattered their cheeks.

Sir, I think you' d better set up a worship for this god in the city. He works greater miracles than I' ve ever seen. I think that perhaps the reason he' s so powerful is because he' s the god that makes wine flow. Wine is the most powerful thing in the world. If there' s no wine, there' s no love or any other pleasure.

Chor: I do not want to speak words of disrespect before a king and yet the words must be spoken--Dionysus is the equal of the greatest gods.

Pen (ignoring chorus): I don' t blame you for being impressed by the tricks and the fury. You' re a simple man. (Almost pleading.) We can' t have things like this going on in our city. The flummery and hysteria gives rise to more flummery and hysteria just like flame feeds on flame. If this doesn' t stop, travellers from the rest of Greece will pass our city by with knowing smiles and say, "Thebes used to be a powerful city before its citizens were driven crazy by an Asiatic god." I' m going to have to act quickly without any time for real planning.

Go to the Electrian gates. Tell the corporal of the guard to call out the regular troops, every soldier that is sworn to protect Thebes. The only way to fight these dancers is fight them as if they were a foreign enemy, which they are in a way as long as this Asiatic madman keeps them hypnotized. I think our swords will be stronger than the swords of the men of the foothills. Things have come to a pretty pass when a gang of women can frighten grown men into running away from them.

Str (coming over close to Pen): You haven' t paid any attention to what I' ve told you, Pentheus. You' ve treated me with violence but I' m still giving you advice that it' s desperately necessary for you to accept. Don' t fight against a god, Pentheus. (Pentheus who has turned away from him turns back angrily to interrupt him.) Be quiet! This is your last chance. Dionysus will not allow you to drive his dancers from the screaming mountain.

Pen: Don' t preach at me, you Asiatic wart-hog. You' re out of jail. Isn' t that enough for you? Are you trying to talk your way back into it?

Str: You should sacrifice to him instead of kicking the ground in anger. Hah,

a man fighting a god.

Pen: I' ll sacrifice to him all night. I' ll give him all the sacrifice he' s entitled to. I' ll cut the throats of a hundred of those screaming whores on his altar.

Str: It will be rather embarrassing when your great army with all its swords and spears and bronze shields starts retreating before a few women waving sticks at them.

Pen: This foreigner is certainly an exhausting opponent to have. In chains or out of them, he can' t keep his tongue quiet.

Str: Sir, the whole thing can be settled very easily.

Pen: How? By my becoming the slave of my slaves?

Str: I' m trying to save you by means of my powers.

Pen: You' ve already made a pact with the dancers. You' re one of them.

Str: The only pact I' ve made is with the god himself.

Pen (goes to gate, shouts in): Bring my armor. (Stranger comes behind him. Pentheus turns.) Keep quiet.

(Stranger screams softly and piercingly and touches him.)

Str: Would you like to see them lying out there in the mountain forest?

Pen: I certainly would. I' d give somebody a great deal of gold if I could manage that.

Str: You seem to have a sudden love for them.

Pen: I hate the sight of drunken women.

Str: And yet you would like to see something that you hate.

Pen: I certainly would like to hide behind the pines and watch them.

Str: Even if you go secretly they' ll discover you.

Pen: Then I' ll go openly. That' s a good suggestion.

Str: Would you like me to help you get there?

Pen (grabbing Stranger' s hand): Yes. (lets go.) Well, there' s no real hurry.

Str: You' ll have to put on a linen dress.

Pen: Am I to be a woman?

Str: They' d kill you if they thought you were a man.

Pen: That' s true. Yes, that' s a good suggestion. You' ve been a great deal of help to me all along.

Str: Dionysus has told me what to do.

Pen: What had we better do first?

Str: I' ll take you into the palace and dress you.

Pen: In a woman' s dress? I' d be ashamed to.

Str: It doesn' t have to be you that goes to spy on them. You could send somebody else.

Pen: What kind of dress would it be?

Str: Long robes and a band around your hair, a faun skin draped across your shoulders--and a thyrsus, of course.

Pen: I can' t wear a woman' s dress.

Str: If you attack the dancers openly, you' ll cause bloodshed.

Pen: That' s right. I ought to find out how strong they are before I send my troops against them.

Str: Much wiser than hunting down violence with violence.

Pen: How will I get through Thebes without people seeing me?

Str: I will lead you through deserted streets.

Pen: Anything is better than to be mocked by those dancers. We' ll go into the palace and ... I' ll decide there what I want to do.

Str: Whatever you decide, I' ll be ready for you.

Pen: I' ll go in now. When I come out I' ll either be dressed in full armor or ready to go with you. (Exits.)

Str (to dancers): Women, our animal is in the trap. He is ready to die on the screaming mountain. Dionysus, the next move is yours. You are nearer to him

than we are.

If we are to have vengeance, give him panic. Pull him apart with not quite insane fears and desires. He must choose to dress as a woman, wear clothes he would never wear with unfrenzied senses.

I want him to be laughed at, led through the crowded streets dressed as a maiden, through the very city where he made threats against our god.

I will go into the palace and dress him myself with the robes he is going out to meet death in. I want him to know Dionysus, the god who is terror and joy.

(Musicians have started palying during the last of this. Dancers join. Stranger watches for a moment and then exits.)

Chor: Has the time come when I can dance barefoot on the mountain, flinging my head back in the clean, misty air? - Like a faun leaping in the green joy of the meadow far from terror, far from the heavy breathing ring of watchers, the woven nets of the hunters, and the hunters have shouted at their dogs and called them back, then the faun, almost breathless with running, dances like a storm cloud in the wet meadow, rejoicing in places empty of men and in the life that rustles the shadowy hair of the forest.

What is wisdom? And what is the power of holding your enemy in your hand, a power given to you by a god? That which is beautiful shall be loved forever.

Anti: Restless and inevitable is the power of the gods; punishing those who are hardminded and without wisdom, those who will not worship. The gods, in their cunning, run on unyielding legs of time, slowly pursuing, slowly devouring their guilty victims.

It is never right to go beyond the limits of mankind, either in thought or action. It is safer to believe that power only lies with the gods and with whatever is a god and that these limits will bind us forever.

What is wisdom? And what is the power of holding your enemy in your hand, a power given to you by a god. That which is beautiful shall be loved forever.

Chor: A man is happy when he has finished working. A man is happy when he finds money or when he receives power. A man hopes and a thousand men may have a thousand hopes - some bring rewards and some don't. But a man is happy when he is happy in the heat of the moment.

What is wisdom? And what is the power of holding your enemy in your hand, a power given to you by a god. That which is beautiful shall be loved forever.

(Stranger enters calling offstage through the gate to Pentheus)

Str: You, Pentheus, anxious to see something it is forbidden to see, hurrying toward something it is not necessary to hurry toward, come out and join me by the gates. Let us see how you look as a woman. Let us see how you will look to your mother when she kills you. (Pentheus enters in costume) Hail, daughter of Cadmus!

Pen: But now I seem to see two suns and a double city under their flickering light (Turns to Stranger) And you, stranger, you seem to walk before me like a bull. There are horns in your head. Were you an animal all the time? Is that your real shape?

Str: The god is with us. He was once our enemy but he is now our friend. You see what you should see.

Pen: How do I look? Do I look as beautiful as my sister? Do I walk with the dignity of my mother?

Str: You look like both of them. I' m afraid that lock of hair isn' t quite in place.

Pen: I was dancing in the palace. I must have loosened it.

Str: I' ll fix it for you. Lean your head back. That' s what I' m here for--to dress you perfectly.

Pen: Yes. You are the one to dress me perfectly. I am made over to you now.

Str: And the belt on the dress is too loose. Look how uneven it is around the ankles.

Pen: Only on the right side. The left side is perfect. (He looks back over his shoulder at both legs one by one--bending his knees in a womanly way.)

Str: (Straightening the dress): You' ll see what a good friend I really am when you see how purely the dancers behave up there in spite of what you expected.

Pen: Which hand do I hold the thyrsus in--the right or the left? (demonstrating as if before a mirror).

Str: You raise it in you right in rhythm with your right foot. (Pentheus tries it awkwardly) Your mind has changed.

Pen: Could I carry that mountain on my shoulders if I wanted to?

Str: If you wanted to, you could. A few hours ago your spirit wasn' t healthy. Now it is as it should be.

Pen: What would be the best way to get it on my shoulders? Should I pry it up or should I kneel down and tear the mountain out with my arms?

Str: You' d destroy all the shrines of Pan on the mountain if you did something like that. You wouldn' t want to hurt a little god would you?

Pen: You' re right. Anyway, women oughtn' t to be conquered through strength. I' ll hide among the pine trees.

Str: Almost any hiding place is a good one for a man who is watching the dancers secretly.

Pen: Um. I wonder what they' re doing now. I wonder if they' re making love in the bushes.

Str: Do you want to watch them making love? Well, perhaps you' ll catch them at it, unless you' re caught first.

Pen: Take me there by the public highway. I want all the countryside to watch me while I go on this errand.

Str: You are doing this for your city. You alone. You have a contest to engage in that you were destined for. I' ll follow you and give you safe conduct there. But other hands will bring you home.

Pen: My mother?

Str: All men will see you.

Pen: I won' t mind being seen.

Str: You will be carried home--

Pen: You' re pampering me.

Str: In your mother' s arms.

Pen: You' re doing too much for me.

Str: As much as I promised.

Pen (smiling childishly): Well, I' m off to claim my reward. (Bounces off)

Str: Strange you are, strange and terrible, and you will suffer strangeness and terror when you get there; and you will receive a cleansing from terror, a cleansing from strangeness.

Stretch out you hands for him, Agave. Stretch out your hands, nieces

and sisters of his, daughters of Cadmus. I bring this boy to a great contest, a contest where the victory will be with god, the god of the screamers and the dancers, god. (Silent in awe and then slowly turns to the Chorus) It' s happening. (Exits).

Chor: Run, swift bitch-hounds of madness, run to the mountain, run howling where the daughters of Cadmus hold their worship. Enter into their hearts as swiftly as a breath of black air, consume their hearts with madness against the man wearing woman' s clothes, the man who is watching their madness.

Then his mother will see him watching from some high place. "Look!" she cries, "What is that thing watching us, that thing with yellow eyes staring from the pinetop. Look at it, there."

Then let Justice come openly, let Justice come with a sword in her hand, openly and without mercy. Let Justice stab the throat of the lawless man, the godless man, the man born of monsters.

Anti: Oh, Dionysus, when a man denies you and your mother, when a man tries to force the gates that cannot be forced, setting his mind against sanity, for him death is the issue of all his purposes, violent against what never can be conquered; but the man who asks no questions about things that belong to the gods, his is a painless life.

I do not envy the wisdom of the violent. It is a delight for me to hunt other things, dancing for the gods as they appear before me, worshiping the gods through the short nights and days of my life.

Then let Justice come openly, let Justice come with a sword in her hand, openly and without mercy; let Justice stab the throat of the lawless man, the godless man, the man born of monsters.

Let yourself be seen as a bull, let yourself be seen as a snake with many heads. Let yourself be seen as a flaming lion. O, beast-god, show yourself smiling before this hunter, show yourself as he hunts among your animals, appear before him savagely smiling.

(Musicians play and dancers dance a dance to make the curse come true. Then Messenger enters and walks to gate. With arms folded and back to audience.)

Mess: Family of Cadmus, earthborn and known throughout the world for happiness; now even a slave weeps for you.

(Chorus comes over and taps him on the shoulder. He turns.)

Chor: What is this news you' re announcing?

Mess: Pentheus is dead.

(The women scream in joy the same way that the Stranger had screamed at Pentheus.)

Chor (Face upward): God, you have shown yourself powerful.

Mess: What's the matter with you, woman? Are you happy over my master's death?

Chor: I was a stranger in your city. Now your master is dead and my master has triumphed. No one will throw me in chains now or try to silence me.

Mess: Do you think Thebes has no men left in it?

Chor: Thebes has nothing to do with me. Dionysus is my city.

Mess: Oh, I don't suppose I blame you, and yet it isn't a beautiful thing to see women rejoicing over a violent death or the suffering of a city and a family.

Chor: Tell me, how did he die?

Mess: I went along with him and the stranger as a sort of body guard. I met them on the road about a mile outside the gates. It was a beautiful day and we walked the easiest way to the mountain, down through the two villages that were raided by the wild women and up through the foothills, crossing the river at the wooden bridge.

We rested and waited in a meadow full of tall grass and wild barley, moving only slightly and saying nothing. Above us there was a small stream edged with pine trees which trickled down from the rocks. Along it we began to see the wild women, peaceful now and doing the chores of their daily living. One was repairing a thyrsus that had lost some ivy leaves from its tip, another was washing a faun-skin, two or three others were combing their hair and singing hymns of Dionysus in antiphony.

Poor Pentheus, who didn't seem to be able to see the women, finally whispered, "Stranger, I can't see these creatures from where I am. If I could only get to the top of one of those high pine trees over there, I could see everything."

Then I saw a miracle. There was a giant pine tree about fifty feet from us whose tip seemed to stab the blue sky itself; he seized that tip and bent it down, down, down towards the black earth as the bow bends for an arrow.

Then he took hold of Pentheus, with his hands around his waist and carried him and placed him gently on a branch of the bent tree. Then he let the tree snap back again and it rose slowly into the air with my master riding on its back,

half asleep.

When the tree stopped and I could distinguish him crouching there, the stranger was gone and there was a voice from the air crying, "Women, I bring you a man that has mocked you. Punish him." As the voice was saying this there was a glare like fire between the air and the earth, and afterwards the forest was quiet as if the air had gone still and you couldn' t hear a leaf move or a bird cry.

The women, there were more of them now, looked questioningly around, like cattle who have heard an uncertain noise in the distance. Again the voice thundered--and this time they must have recognized their god, for they seemed more like birds, beating their arms and legs with incredible swiftness and flocking towards the meadow. They were all there, his mother, his sisters, all of the women, leaping over dry rocks, coming from everywhere along the banks of the stream.

Then a few of them located the tiny figure high up in the pine tree and began to throw rocks at it, climbing up to higher ground to make the distance of their aim shorter. Others began clawing the bark from the pine tree with their bare hands and a few more standing up the stream tried to hurl their thyrsoi at him like javelins. But there he sat, too high for them to touch him, poor fellow, hopelessly trapped.

Finally some tried to set the green wood of the pine on fire while others drew branches from a shattered oak and used them as levers against the tangled roots of the tree, but they effected nothing.

The Agave said, "Come, worshipers, let us stand in a circle around the tree and start it swaying back and forth. We can shake this creature down, we can shake down this creature that has been watching us from the branches.

And they put a thousand hands against the pine and it swayed and tottered--and down from his branch, down to the needle-covered earth fell Pentheus. Screaming for he knew he was going to die.

His mother began the slaying and fell on him. Weakly he tried to pull the false hair from his head so his mother could recognize him. While she was clawing at his face, he pulled one of her hands to his cheek and said, "Mother, look at me. I am Pentheus, your son. You bore me from your womb. Let someone else kill me."

But she was like a madwoman and her mouth frothed and her eyes stared at nothing. She seized the arm he had touched her with, and, standing with her foot hard against his ribs, she wrenched it from its socket. The god made her able to do this without effort.

And, on the other side, his sister was tearing at his flesh with her

fingernails--and the rest of the women gathered around him and began to join in on the sacred work, they shouting and he screaming as long as he was able to scream.

After a while it was over and they began amusing themselves with his body. One lady lifted an arm high into the air and waved it like a thyrsus. Another was trying to toss a leg, which still had a hunting-boot on it, into the crotch of a nearby oaktree. His ribs had been broken open and they were playing with the fragments. Every hand in that forest had blood on it.

His body lies scattered now among the stones, in the tall grass of the meadow, and in the underbrush that rises above it.--And his head. His mother seized that, yelling like someone quite overcome with victory, and transfixed it on the point of her thyrsus. And now she is carrying it through the forest, exulting as if it were the trophy of some great animal, and telling all around her that she and her god had been mighty hunters and had won a superhuman prize. --The prize, I think, will be deadly sorrow for her share in the contest.

I don' t want to stay here any longer. She' ll be coming here and I don' t want to see her. There' s nothing I can do about this, I guess--just leave you women to your triumph. (He exits.)

(Dancers and musicians begin)

Chor: I will sing a song for the death of Pentheus. I will sing a song for the death of the dragon child. He put on our clothes and they could not contain him. He raised our thyrsus and it was a thyrsus of poison. I will sing a song for the death of Pentheus. He followed a bull into the mountains.

Oh, sister worshiper, you have made a song that we can sing forever, you have made a song that will give you deadly sorrow forever, it is a victory that will be remembered forever. Sing the song, Agave, with your hands gloved in the blood of your child. (Chorus stops the dancers and musicians with her hand) I think I see her coming. She' s stumbling as if she' s carrying a great burden. (Agave enters) Come and dance with us, Agave.

(Agave is carrying the head of Pentheus. She lifts it high.)

Ag: Look at this, sisters from Asia.

Chor: Why are you calling us?

Ag: I have brought a curly-headed thing from the mountain, a trophy blessed by Dionysus.

Chor: I see it. You are one of us now.

Ag: I didn't have to set a trap for him, I caught him out in the open, with my bare hands.

Chor: In what lonely canyon?

Ag: On the mountain.

Chor: The mountain.

Ag: Where I killed him.

Chor: Who killed him?

Ag: I had the honor.

Chor: Blessed Agave.

Ag: They call me that now.

Chor: Who helped you kill him?

Ag: Cadmus--(She is beginning to run down).

Chor: Cadmus?

Ag: Cadmus' daughters helped me prepare him.

Chor: But you caught him?

Ag: Yes, it was a lucky day for hunting.

Chor: Blessed Agave.

Ag: You will share in the feast with us tonight.

Chor: I am not hungry.

Ag: The animal is young. See the hair on his cheeks is as soft as a young bull's.

Chor: (Examining the head): Yes, his hair makes him look like a wild beast.

Ag: Dionysus was the huntsman. He guided the beast into my hands.

Chor: Yes, our lord is a hunter.

Ag: You are proud of me?

Chor: I am proud of you.

Ag: And Cadmus.

Chor: Will be proud of his daughter.

Ag: And also--(pauses)

Chor: Pentheus, your son.

Ag: Will be proud of his mother

Chor: For she is carrying a trophy

Ag: The head of a mountain lion

Chor: A brave trophy

Ag: And bravely obtained.

Chor: Do you delight in what you have obtained?

Ag: I delight in what I have hunted and in the god that helped me hunt it. This day will be remembered.

Chor: Then show your trophy to the Thebans; let them rejoice for you and our master.

Ag (yelling into the gates): Come out of the gates, men of Thebes. See the trophy that I have here. See the beast we daughters of Cadmus have hunted down. Break your spiked javelins, burn your cunning traps. They will no longer be needed while we are hunters. We, the daughters of Cadmus, killed this creature with our sharp white hands, we caught him and tore him apart with our hands.

Where is my father? I want him to see this. Where is Pentheus? (To Chorus) He is my son. He will want to mount this head above the doorway of his palace; it is the head of a fine mountain lion caught when it was young and proud. Cadmus, Pentheus, where are you? Come out and see this.

(Cadmus enters from stage left followed by two servants carrying a bloodstained sack. Agave at the gate doesn't see him.)

Cad: Follow me, servants, carrying this impossibly sad burden, the last flesh of Pentheus, collected here and there in the forest before the wolves and birds could get to it. (To Anti-Chorus) I learned what my daughter had done when I got back to town from the dancing, leading old Tiresias cheerfully through the city gate. They told me then and I turned the long way back to the

mountain.

Two of my daughters were still there, dancing and screaming. Not as they used to but more solemnly and intensely--as if their mouths were filled with acid-tasting sorrow. I left them there.

They told me I would find Agave here, dancing before the gates of the city. And I see she is here.

Ag: (Seeing Cadmus): Father, look! Look what I have done. I caught this with my bare hands. (She presses the head on him.) Take this father. Put this gift of your daughter above the doorway of your house. I meant to give it to my son for his palace but he hasn't come to see his mother's triumph. Take it, father, you deserve it more. You fathered the daughters who were able to hunt this. (Cadmus doesn't touch the head. Agave puts it on the ground.) Have your friends to a feast and show them this. Your deeds of valor have been multiplied in your children.

Cad: Deadly sorrow. Not to be looked at. Did you know what you killed? Did you know the sacrifice you were making to the god? (She looks bewildered) Yes, we have invited all Thebes for a feast--sewing portions of deadly sorrow and shame for all our family. The god has destroyed my family, with justice and beyond justice. The god who is supposed to be the son of my daughter, to be my own grandchild.

Ag: Father, you're an old fool. Don't you understand what I'm giving you? I wish Pentheus were here and could see this trophy. But he probably wouldn't be interested either. He isn't much of a hunter. He'd rather fight against the gods than go out hunting like other young men do. I wish you'd say something to him about that, father. (To servants) Will some of you please go out and call my son so he can see his mother's triumph.

Cad: Oh, if you would never waken into grief, never again see your actions clearly. If this madness could only last forever--you would not be fortunate, but your dreams would escape misfortune.

Ag: What is there that is not bravely done? What cause is there for deadly sorrow?

Cad: Daughter, look up at the sky.

Ag: All right, I'm looking at it. (Looks for a while)

Cad: Does it seem the same or is it beginning to look different to you?

Ag: It does seem brighter and more like a sky should look.

Cad: Are you feeling calmer now?

Ag: I don't know what you mean, but ... my senses seem to be clearer ... something has changed in my mind.

Cad: Can you understand me now when I talk to you?

Ag: I don't remember what we were talking about.

Cad: Do you remember the name of the man you married?

Ag: Certainly. His name was Echion. He was one of the sons of the dragon. He died a few years ago. But ...

Cad: Did you bear him a son?

Ag: Of course I did. Pentheus. You must have seen him recently. How can you forget his name?

Cad: Whose face are you holding in your hands?

Ag: A mountain lion. They tell me it was a mountain lion.

Cad: Come. Just look at it. It will only take a moment just to look at it.

Ag: (Looking): What is it? What is this thing?

Cad: Keep your eyes on it. Look at it closely.

Ag: I see. It has a face of deadly sorrow.

Cad: Is it still a mountain lion?

Ag: No. I am holding the head of Pentheus.

Cad: You have been carrying him for a long time.

Ag: Who killed him? How did it get into my hands?

Cad: You killed him. You and your sisters.

Ag: Where did he die? What has been happening? Where did he die?

Cad: Up on the same mountain where the hounds tore Actaeon to pieces.

Ag: What was he doing there? Why did he go up on the mountain?

Cad: He went up there to insult the god you were worshiping.

Ag: I was worshiping? What was I doing there?

Cad: The women of the city were insane and you were among them.

Ag: Yes, now I understand. Dionysus wanted to destroy us.

Cad: He had his reasons.

Ag: May I see my son's body now?

Cad: I have it here.

Ag: Is it in bad condition?

Cad: You'd better wait a while before you look at it.

Ag: Is it broken?

Cad: There's nothing to be done. Sit here and rest a moment.

Ag: Did Pentheus go mad too? (She sits)

Cad: He was like you, unable to worship a god he ought to worship. You have to call that madness.

He was the only male in my whole house, the last hope of my family. Now there is nothing but ruin.

He was the breath of my house. Oh, child, it was you, my daughter's son, that held my place together and was a terror to the city, who protected an old man from the insults of old age, who kept my house together and me in it.

But now, any stranger may insult me on the streets of the city, any whim of the rabble may drive me into exile. I am dishonored, an old man who could not build a house that would last his lifetime.

Oh, child, child that I will still love most of all, never again will you touch my beard and call me grandfather, put your hand on my shoulder and say, "Who wrongs you, sir, who dishonors you? Tell me who wrongs you and I'll punish him."

But now. Oh, everything's gone. I am an old man who was once a hero watching what the gods have done and believing with all my heart in their filthy power.

Ag: (pointing to sack): Is this my son's body?

Cad: Most of it.

Ag: I' ll take it in my arms for a moment. It was once a baby that I told lies to and sung to. I held him in my arms then like this. Then it was a boy with the down just beginning to grow on his face, blushing often (She looks down at the bloodstains.)

Cad: Stop it, Agave.

Ag: Then he was a man in the terrible fury of manhood. I didn' t know him very well, then. It wasn' t the same somehow. Now, he' s in my arms again and I can carry him--(She suddenly throws the sack down.) Him, it. A sack of jumbled flesh.

Cad: None of us are much more than that, Agave. Even when we are alive.

Ag: Now is about the time for a god to come in and tell us the moral. To come and strut about and blame us for the weaknesses that we can' t help and for the strengths that annoy them. In a minute Dionysus will appear from a creaking maching and tell us about justice and sanity and what we did that made the gods offended.

Cad: Agave--

Ag: Shut up! How could that bitch-god punish me more, that god who has no children and hates mothers. Do you hear me, Dionysus? Come down, bitch-god, come down from your machine! (She pauses, waiting.) He' d rather leave me with the body of my son. (She goes over and picks up the head.) This head, I wonder if it can sing.

Cad: Has Dionysus sent you mad again?

Ag: The head of Orpheus sings and prophecies. (Pats the head.) Sing, son. Sing and prophecy. Like the head of Orpheus. Dionysus killed him too.

(Dionysus emerges from machine. Any device may be used but his appearance must be sudden, mechanized, and a bit ridiculous. He is the Stranger wearing a beard.)

Dion: It will not speak, madam. Your son was an ordinary sacrifice, as likely to prophecy as the wheat which is cut down in the fields.

He was neither able to accept my spirit nor able to contain it when it was forced upon him. He has been broken like a clay cup breaks when hot wine pours into it. You' ve broken cups like that yourself. They don' t prophecy.

There is nothing worthy of pity in a man who is unable to contain his god. He will never prophecy, and will be neither praised nor remembered. Nor will you, madam, although you have cracked and not broken.

Go into exile now, Cadmus, taking your whole family with you. There is no room in Thebes now for you and your family, murderers and children of murderers.

I put a curse on all those who are unable to receive me. I put a curse on all those who are unable to contain me.

(Lights dim and Dionysus and Chorus disappear from stage.)

Jack Spicer: from a detective novel

I

As good a place as any to start is with John James Ralston sitting almost alone and slightly drunk at three o' clock of a Thursday afternoon (the time of day is probably not accurate, the day of the week almost certainly is) at a small beer and wine bar called The Birdcage on the upper edge of Grant Avenue in San Francisco. The undeniables (those things that he later could not help remembering when other details were hazy or forgotten and, thus, the things, details, that must have been with him like invisible animals perched on his shoulder when the other details, the ones he had now forgotten or half remembered, happened just as importantly before him) were that he was in San Francisco for the first time in seven years, that his luggage was resting in three separate lockers in the Greyhound Bus Station, and that the unemphatic but steady June sunlight of San Francisco was shining directly through the plateglass window of the bar into his eyes.

This somehow emphasized the strangeness. Bars in Boston (or, for that matter, bars almost anywhere) do not have plateglass windows. Rather, he thought, giving full consideration to the subject, they must have plateglass windows and then paint them black or red or something. He could remember bars with plateglass windows in Boston, but he could not remember the afternoon sun shining through them.

He signaled the bartender for another ale. The greenness of the bottle it came in somehow looked even more unfamiliar in the sunlight than the sunlight itself. But it shouldn' t look unfamiliar, he thought, I used to drink it when I lived here. Did bars have plateglass windows when I lived here? He stopped the (half-amusing) train of thought and wondered--did they have plateglass windows when I lived here? No, he finally decided, not fully certain of the memory, I was twenty three when I left here, I probably didn' t go into bars on afternoons.

There are a thousand details Ralston was not able to remember from his first afternoon in The Birdcage. Did he look through the plateglass window at the people passing by on the street? Did he, if it really was three o' clock, watch the old Italian women out shopping for groceries, the Chinese children on their way home from school? Did he notice the morror in the window in which one could watch, he did watch, people before they passed the window and after they left it?

A girl with a pimply face and hornrimmed glasses spoke to him. Again a false, or at best, a reconstructed memory. Just as Ralston could not really remember what really happened when he took the train trip from Texas to California when he was three years old but had had to piece together the story of it from stories his mother had told him, half-memories, and sheer

imagination, so it was here, so it was always with any process or person whose beginning when later remembered assumes importance. Whom did I first speak to in The Birdcage he asked himself months later, and he conjured himself up an obvious composite, as patently artificial as a reconstructed California mission, a girl with a bad complexion and hornrimmed glasses who spoke to him:

"You look bored," she said. She looked directly, as if in excuse for her boldness, at the copy of Partisan Review which he had placed next to his ale glass on the bar.

"I was thinking of windows," he answere, startled enough, for he was not conscious that anyone was sitting beside him in the bar, to give an almost direct answer to the question. "about why they always paint windows in bars. Except here."

The girl giggled. In his reconstructed memory the giggle had more or less the sound of a fingernail scratched across a plateglass window. She remained silent, staring at his copy of Partisan Review.

He too remained obstinately silent. He had seen this girl in the Cafe Espresso houses in the Village when he was a graduate student at Columbia, he had talked with her at all night parties given at coldwater flats, and, on several dismal occasions, had gone to bed with her. When he left New York to teach in Boston he had found her in many of his classes (making a consistent and grubby B minus whenever he had anything to do about it) and several of her (a little older) were among his wife' s best friends. He did not remember her in California, but he was twenty three, he reminded himself again, when he left California.

The girl, by now his (reconstructed) memory pictured her as black haired and rather pudgy, got up from the bar stool and went to the juke box. "I' ll bet five to one that she plays a Miles Davis record," Ralston said to himself, almost out loud. She played a Miles Davis record. Pleased, for the first time since his plane had landed, he ordered another bottle of ale from the bartender although his glass was still half full. The girl stood by the juke box swaying slightly and listening. Before the record was over she came back to her stool. She turned to him. "Mallarmé," she said, with the air of someone who was finishing a discussion.

For the first time Ralston began to realize that the ale was making his mind sluggish. This was all silly, a waste of the opportunity of first impressions. He should call up some of his old acquaintances, look in the phone book until he discovered one name that was there seven years ago which was still there, have dinner with this one and his new wife, or that one, who was suddenly bald, or that one, who had written poetry and now was selling office equipment. Anything was better than this hole in the memory, this passive self indulgence.

The sunlight was glaring even more unemphatically through the window. He suddenly wanted to shout out to this ridiculous girl, to this ridiculous bar, regardless of consequences, "I am J. J. Ralston. A book of poetry of mine is reviewed in that magazine you' re staring at. What do you think of that, you bitch?" Or should he leave this impossible bar (no more typical of the San Francisco he remembered than the window was), find a hotel room, get his bag out of the locker, have a quiet dinner, and go to sleep? Or should he have

dinner first?

Instead of doing either of these things he bought a bag of peanuts from the bartender. They were unshelled and there seemed to be thousands of them in the package. He offered some to the girl who was still there, Ralston half suspected she would have disappeared during his train of thought, sipping slowly at her glass of dark beer. She nodded, swept a handful of the peanuts next to her glass, and thanked him.

"Everybody gives me peanuts," she continued morosely. "Other people they give beers to or even Bristol Creme Sherry. Me they give peanuts." She made no effort to finish her beer as she might have if her intention was to have Ralston buy her another. She merely chewed peanuts and looked glum.

"I wasn't trying to be funny about the window," Ralston said. "It's what I was really thinking."

"Oh, I know you weren't trying to put me down," she replied. "That's why I said Mallarmé. You come from the East, don't you?"

"You know that from the way I talk?" Ralston ventured.

"No. From the suit. You can always tell by the suit." She closed her eyes for a moment. "Unless you borrowed it from somebody."

Ralston (and the ale) consented to the stereotype for the moment. "I'm from Boston," he said proudly, deciding to make the best imitation of Ivy League of which he was capable.

The girl's eyes again fell to Partisan Review. "And you've come to dig the San Francisco Renaissance?"

This was a little too close to the truth. In a sense he had come to dig the San Francisco Renaissance. But the very recognizability was, as being recognized generally is, insulting and unfair. He examined his own weapons. He could pretend to be a reporter from an Eastern magazine and--

"You teach in a small college and write literary criticism," the girl was saying. "You used to write poetry but you gave it up after your wife had her first child."

Ralston felt absurdly pleased as one does when a perceptive stranger (she had scored so well on the rest of it) accuses you of the one fault of which you can not possibly be guilty. It brought him somehow a full acquital of everything else. He put his hand on the copy of Partisan Review as if for support and said, "Actually I'm a pusher. I play the trombone and prefer men to women. I escaped from Boston with three sailors and six ounces of heroin."

She sat studying him for a minute. She nodded. "You may be a homosexual. You stopped writing poetry because you turned thirty."

Acquital has to stop somewhere, Ralston thought. Even the fact that I still write poetry doesn't cover the fact that I have passed thirty. He wondered why he minded less about his wife and the literary criticism and the college. He lapsed into an offended silence.

"Am I right?" She was a little girl now, genuinely anxious to know how she had scored on the spelling test. She could not, Ralston figured her age at twenty one, possibly imagine that the mention of his age depressed him.

"Why have I come out here to dig the San Francisco Renaissance?" he asked, half curious and half to postpone his inevitably qualified answer to her question.

"Because you want your heart back. Because you feel you lost something." She drank the rest of her beer in her enthusiasm. "Now, am I right? Now tell me, am I right?"

"You scored about fifty percent." Ralston became big brother now. It was the easiest thing to do. "I am married. I do teach in a small college. I do write some literary criticism. But I haven't stopped writing poetry and I don't have any children." He felt very proud to have said so little. She might even have heard of the poet J. J. Ralston, might even conceivably have read his book. He was dealing with her very fairly.

"That's more than fifty percent," the girl said.

"I suppose it is," Ralston replied. He signaled the bartender to refill the girl's glass. He now knew that he was going to tell the girl the full story of what had brought him to this dingy sunlit bar, knew it with the feeling of relieved inevitability that he had when he knew that he was going to get into a fight at a party, or pass out in fifteen minutes, or, merely, certainly, do something extremely foolish.

He looked at the girl. The new beer seemed to be as distant from her as the old one had been. "I used to live in California," he said. "I came back."

The bartender returned with his change. The girl remained silent, not even--as if she wanted to break the connection--eating his peanuts. But the decision was made. He had made scores of classes pay attention to stories far less interesting than the one he was about to tell.

"It was a football game," he said.

The girl looked puzzled.

"I think I came back to California because I watched a football game."

"It's the wrong season, isn't it?"

"It was last fall. I was watching my college playing another one, a traditional rival."

"What's the name of your college?" the girl asked.

"Pryce. You've never heard of it. It's just outside Boston. And the name of the other college was Grove Falls. That's in western Massachusetts."

The girl was silent. She had taken off her glasses and was polishing them with a rather grubby handkerchief. Ralston went on--certain now that he could not tell the story but more certain than ever that he had to tell it. "It was like any other football game, I guess. The point was what I started to think about while the game was going on." Impossible, he thought, meaning can't filter through embarrassment. "Grove Falls was beating the hell out of us. They were leading 24-0 at the beginning of the last quarter and then our team sent in a boy named Shay, a third string quarterback."

"And Shay saved the day," the girl said.

"I know it sounds like that, but listen and you'll see what I mean. I can't even remember what happened in the fourth quarter, how the touchdowns were scored or anything like that. What I do remember is Shay, how he acted. He took the most incredible chances--passed from behind his own goal line, reversed his field three or four times on every running play--that sort of thing. When it was all over, Pryce had beaten them 28-24, beaten a vastly superior team. But that doesn't matter. What I'm trying to say is that I suddenly realized in that fourth quarter that I had never written a poem using the energy that they used,

taking the chances that they took."

"You mean a poem about football?"

"No." Ralston was disappointed. His story wasn't coming through at all. "Football doesn't have anything to do with it. I mean pitting the energy, the chance-taking, or even a fraction of it against the eight man line of language. What Shay was doing that afternoon was not human but not difficult either. I realized that I had never done it, but that I wanted to do it more than anything else in the world--and not with a football."

"So you burned all your previous poetry?"

"Of course I didn't. I had a book ready to come out. It's a good book. They are good poems. There are other ways to play football. Only --"

"Only?"

"Well, that's why I came to San Francisco this summer."

"I don't think you'll find many quarterbacks like that out here, but I wouldn't know," she said quietly. "By the way, what was Shay like in class?"

"Dull and unimaginative. The way good composers are. I taught English for one year at an academy of music and--" Now he had gotten the thing said (or the oversimplification of the thing said) he wanted to switch back gradually to polite, non-autobiographical conversation, but the girl refused to let him:

"And was your wife at this football game with you?"

"Forget it," Ralston said. "I just wanted to tell you why I came back to San Francisco." He turned, as rudely as he could not knowing quite what local conventions of rudeness would be, away and stared or pretended to stare through the plateglass sunlit windwo. That was another thing he could do. It would be seven or eight in Boston now. He could call Anne and tell her that he had arrived safely, or, since he never could really be sure when she did and when she didn't believe him, reassure her that he was really in San Francisco. She would be understanding. No, comfortable. No, disturbed about something that would have absolutely nothing to do with him like a translation of an article she had started since he left, or something she had read about atomic energy in a newspaper, or -- And he would not be sure, never be sure whether she took this attitude to reassure him (as she might professionally pretend a vast unconcern to the hallucinations of one of the children she was treating) or whether it was merely, truly, a kind of gigantic absentmindedness which proceeded from the comfort of their love.

He turned back to the girl. "My wife's a psychiatrist," he said, feeling at the moment that this announcement was a kind of substitute for actually having made the call.

The girl looked down at the squirrel's nest of peanuts in front of her. He could see immediately that she felt she was being, what was it -- put down, put on, put upon, that he was coming back from his wounds to attack her. "No," he said. "Really. She's a psychiatrist. A child psychiatrist. She treats children. Mostly schizophrenic children. It's very interesting work."

"And that's why your wife isn't with you?"

"Yes," Ralston said. "She has her own work." At that lie, which was not really a lie because it was (barring the yes) literally true, the whole scene of what Ralston had, even before it happened, been able to think of only as "telling Anne" came suddenly, unbidden, to his ale-filled mind. One week and a day ago

(it was on a Wednesday certainly, for his last final had been on a Monday and he had had the last grades in on Tuesday) one week ago last Wednesday and they had been sitting (he in the comfortable chair and she on the couch that had the glass coffee table) drinking their early evening Martini, almost ready to go out to the bad restaurant on Charles Street to which they almost always seemed to go when neither she nor he wanted to cook and neither he nor she wanted to make the suggestion of a good restaurant to go to. She had just been telling an elaborate but funny story about the struggle of Dr. Birnbaum (of the second clinic not the first) to persuade her to take her six week vacation in September and October and not, as they had planned, in July and August. Anne loved to tell funny stories about her fellow psychiatrists -- ones that (with suitable adjustments here and there) would have fitted admirably into the New Yorker. When, as he seldom did anymore, he accused her of this (in one way or another), she would say in perfect sincerity (in one way or another), "But Jim, I like the New Yorker."

But this time he had shattered the anecdote, shattered it, as he guessed, not more than a line from its climax. He had put down his martini glass, empty, and said, "Anne, I can't come to Paris with you."

He was sure that her first impulse was to nod her head or to say "You say you can't come to Paris with me --" She was, as she would have pointed out, trained to react to shocking statements that way. If she had that impulse, she suppressed it. Instead, she put down her martini glass and said in a tense and uxorious voice, "Why not?"

They had been planning to go to Europe that summer -- this summer, he amended, eight days ago. He was to spend the last weeks of July and the first of August in Paris finishing the biography of Emily Dickinson which he hoped would both get him an assistant professorship and help him lay to rest the ghost, that timid, vital ghost, that had haunted him since, in early adolescence with the help of Untermeyer's anthology, he had discovered poetry. Anne would be with him on and off, flitting to Psychiatric Congresses (or their equivalents) in places like Zurich and Antwerp and, finally, giving several lectures on American clinical methods at the Sorbonne where she had, only three years before, received her PhD in Clinical Psychology. Then, in the remaining weeks of August, assuming their money would hold out as it was bound not to, they would go to Southern France, Spain and/or Majorca. It was a ponderous plan, a far-sighted one, one which could scarcely be destroyed by a mere sentence over an evening Martini.

"Is it another thing like that Lambretta?"

The first summer of their marriage (and the second of his teaching at Pryce) he had suddenly bought a Lambretta and had cancelled their vague plans of a Canadian vacation with the announcement (just as blunt as this one -- he supposed that psychiatrists, even wives that were psychiatrists, affected people that way) that he wanted to spend a part of the summer driving alone around New England with his Lambretta and a sleeping bag, that he wanted to learn what it was like to be Thoreau before he was too old to learn what it was like to be Thoreau. He broke his leg and his left arm, as she had told him he would, on the first week on a highway outside of Keene, New Hampshire, and Anne, who had been very very generous about it at the time, refraining even from telling

it as an anecdote to her friends, nevertheless had, from time to time as the years passed, made use of the accumulated interest of this generosity.

"No. It is not like the Lambretta," he said and then began, with her help, and exchange of barbed witticisms, old accusations, even intimacies, that were repeated between them, almost ritually, on the occasion of every quarrel. There were set speeches on both sides, formal, and, in a way, reassuring. But they both knew that they were both, almost as a domestic unit, deliberately postponing the time that he would tell her the real reasons, the new reasons for his decision.

When he did finally state them, he stated them well. The football game (or rather the thought arising from the football game which had been, the word was almost festering, in his mind since the end of October) was not mentioned. He transposed. He had been reading Blake, he told her -- into the figure of William Blake he managed to combine his reactions to Shay, the team itself, and the fourth quarter. It was a little literary, but Anne would not know that it was a little literary.

He went on to tell her that he was thirty one and that his poetry, even though it had been published in Hudson and Partisan and Kenyon, and even though his book had received and excellent review from Randall Jarrell in the New York Times Book Review, was not poetry in the sense that a real or imaginary Blake's poetry was poetry -- that it was not even just a qualitative difference (and this was easier to make clear than it would have been if he had talked about the fourth quarter but it was also less true) and that he had, while there might still be time, at least to make an attempt not to be what he had undoubtedly already become -- an, face it, academic poet.

He was going to San Francisco for the summer, he told her. He was going to San Francisco exactly as a psychiatrist might go on a field trip to Uganda if he had heard of mysterious, miraculous cures being worked on schizophrenics by witch doctors. It was a wild goose chase, he told her, but perhaps the mere fact of its being a wild goose chase would have an effect on his poetry.

"But," she said, "I thought you told me --"

"I know," he said. "I think what I've read of the new San Francisco poetry is awful. I think that this talk of a Renaissance is a hoax dreamed up by that old charlatan Slingbot for the sole purpose of giving himself something to write about in the Eastern magazines. But I know where Paris ends, I know where New York ends, I know where Boston ends."

She agreed with him immediately. It was an excellent idea. He could stay the summer in San Francisco and perhaps work on the Emily Dickinson book if he didn't find the William Blake in himself that he expected to find. It would actually save money too. And she realized that she would be so busy in Europe--. Yes. And he could see her mind adjusting to the new circumstances almost thrilled that it had new circumstances to adjust to, like a steeplechase horse suddenly coming upon a new and unexpected fence. And he, of course, if he was robbed of the illusion that he was doing something impractical, something that could not be adjusted against, something, in short, that did not fit into the adult universe in which they both lived, if he was being robbed of this illusion by her practicality, let him be robbed now, at the start of the nonsense, before he had stored up too much imaginary wealth from this gesture, before he felt that his

investment and the interest he drew from it were too precious to be surrendered to the blunt arms of common sense. In short, they went to dinner and discussed his plans for the summer.

But he was not at dinner. It was a week and a day later and he was in San Francisco. He had come upon no angels yet, and attempted to make no last quarter touchdowns, but he was here and ready. He began to feel exhilerated, giddy as if he were a seventeenyearold alone in a new city, as if, to use the phrase that the seventeenyear old would certainly use, he were on the edge of a new adventure.

While he and the girl had been talking a number of people had filtered into the bar, clustering mainly at the tables and talking fairly excitedly to each other -- often as not without a single drink before them. Three of these -- Ralston thought the word must be still "Bohemian" in the West -- had come up to the bar and were talking to the girl next to him. They were quite a collection of types. The evident leader (or, at least, the person who was being followed as he went up to talk to the girl) was a tall thin Negro wearing horn rimmed glasses who looked rather as Abraham Lincoln would have looked if Abraham Lincoln had been a tall Negro wearing horn rimmed glasses. He now turned to Ralston. "This chick tells me you' re a big daddy poet from the East. May we welcome you to The Birdcage?" He bowed deeply from his waist and his two companions began applauding. Several other people at different tables who could not have heard a word of the Negro' s speech took up the applause.

Hostility, curiosity, or what, Ralston wondered. He rose from the bar-stool and bowed quite as deeply to each of them. "I am very happy to receive your greeting."

"My name is Washington Jones," the Negro said. "May I present my two companions? This," he pointed to a young man in blue jeans and a tee-shirt whose dirty blond curls came down almsot to his shoulders, "is John Petersen, pride of Red Oak, Iowa, which itself is the home of radio station KICK, and this," pointing to the other young man who was shorter than even Ralston' s five foot eight, but with a fat baby face and closely cropped black hair, "this is Gregory Taxon, the famous painter of assorted insects and crustaceans. We are all interested in the contemporary arts."

Ralston bowed again. "As you must know," he said, "my name is W. H. Auden."

"No, man." The Negro smiling showed a set of teeth that did not, and Ralston could never figure out why they did not, look like Negro teeth. "No, daddy. You' re not big and fat enough for that."

The one called Petersen with the long dirty blond hair had already picked up Ralston' s almost empty ale bottle. He was looking at it with infinite sadness. "That green death can make you sick," he said in a high penetrating voice. "Drive you out of your skull," then bowing toward Ralston he put the bottle to his mouth and drained what was left in the bottle. "If you' ve got the bread," he added as if as an afterthought, "buy us a pitcher of beer and we can all drink."

"Mr. Petersen is inviting you to join us at our table," the tall Negro said. "And your young lady, of course."

There was no real rudeness to this, Ralston felt. It was more like an

initiation, a rite of passage, or, more exactly, the horseplay indulged in when a newcomer on shipboard crosses the equator. Ralston signaled the bartender who was watching, neither amused or concerned, and order a pitcher of dark beer. He purposely turned his back to everybody as he ordered it, looking directly, not even at the bartender, but at the sunlight which was still streaming through the window. Was he being foolish, he wondered? Were these swans or geese he was inviting to this pitcher of beer? Every social system, every foreign Bohemia, has an aristocracy, a middle class, and a poor-white class, and a collection of people that don' t belong, and, he was looking directly at the light in the window now, travelers like me -- who don' t know at first which is which, who don' t know what which class considers an insult and which an initiation, who don' t know whether the girl and these three strange young me would be the equivalents in another environment of bankers, grocers, or cotton pickers, or are, and this was a frightening thought, equally strangers as himself. "You think too much about people," he told himself firmly and brought the pitcher of beer over to the waiting table.

The three already had glasses and began to pour the dark beer into them as soon as the pitcher arrived. Ralston noticed that the girl was still sitting at the bar. He got up again and came over to her. "Aren' t you coming to the table" he asked.

"No," the girl said, she already had the rest of the peanuts in front of her. "I' ve been there." He voice was utterly final. Ralston paused a minute and then regretfully, as his one bridge into this world was broken, went back to the table. Composite figment of his aftermemory or real, Ralston never saw the girl again.

At the table the blond young man named Petersen was already pouring himself a glass of beer from the pitcher.

"I suppose you' re from Flat Rock," the tall Negro said to Ralston as he sat down.

"Flat Rock?"

"Flat Rock College, man."

Ralston recognized the name. It was a small experimental college somewhere in the wilds of Western Pennsylvania that gave no degrees, no credits, and, so far as Ralston knew, no courses. He had once met a painter who explained the system to him.

"I' m glad they' re afraid to admit it now," Petersen said. "When they first started coming into town they boasted about it. Thousands of them in their beat-up Fords, their wives, their paintings, and their children. Real Grapes of Wrath scene."

"Flat Rock College," Ralston began.

"John is right," the tall Negro interrupted, "although he expressed himself somewhat hysterically. We in North Beach have been obliged to entertain a large number, but certainly not thousands, of refugees from this now unfortunately defunct educational institution. It has become almost natural to presume that any stranger we see is a Flat Rock kiddie. Of course," he interrupted himself by pouring a beer into his almost empty glass, "one could tell immediately by looking at you suit that you aren' t one of them. Flat Rock clothes don' t make it."

Ralston suddenly realized that he had had none of the beer himself. He reached for the pitcher to pour some into his ale glass, but, just as he was touching it, the so-far silent member of the trio grabbed the handle and quickly refilled his own glass.

The tall Negro pointed to him. "Gregory here is making it with a Flat Rock chick whenever he isn't painting pictures of insects. That is, he says he's making it with her."

The short boy's face broke into a pleasant foolish grin. "Sure," he said.

There was very little beer left in the pitcher. Ralston poured all of it into his glass. "I didn't know Flat Rock College had closed," he said. "When did all this happen?"

But it was as if the disappearance of the last beer in the pitcher had made him disappear also. The trio did not even ignore him. They merely started talking among themselves, sipping their beer slowly now, making allusive jokes among themselves in the latest fashionable language about how somebody had gotten into a fight with somebody over something, about how somebody else was going to leave town and whether he really was, even, and this was the only moment when Ralston was even faintly astonished, about a movie with Ava Gardner in it. Ralston thought as he sat there vaguely waiting for something to happen how well Lewis Carroll had described this kind of situation, the classic Stranger at a Table. Here was the Mad Tea Party. Washington Jones, if that really was his name, the Mad Hatter, John Petersen a rather fuzzy March Hare, and Gregory Taxon behind his pleasant foolish grin a Dormouse almost certain to be stuffed into the teapot (or the beer pitcher) at the end of the afternoon, and Ralston, a disenchanted Alice, who unlike his prototype had played the role often enough not to be puzzled or to ask questions about anything but not often enough not to be annoyed when questions, unasked, were unanswered. He was not going to buy them another pitcher of beer, even Alice had not been asked to bring her own tea with her, but he was not going to leave until he could appear, if only for a moment, in a less humiliating role.

So Ralston sat there, drinking his beer slowly as they drank theirs slowly because there was going to be no more beer, listening, he idly thought, as if he were not really listening to conversation but to a dull modern jazz record -- the Mad Hatter an insinuating tenor sax, the March Hare a ragged trumpet, the Dormouse -- no, he could not fit the Dormouse into that combo at all -- he would have to be an oboe. Ralston had begun to wonder how an oboe would sound in a dull modern jazz record when he saw the door open.

This was one of the few things that Ralston later could be completely sure of. The girl might have been a composite; he had known Jones and Petersen and Taxon later and his memory of their conversation and their actions might have been based on how he knew, later, that they must have behaved then and not on how they actually did. But the figure now standing in the doorway, Ralston (the future Ralston that is) was sure he could remember in every detail and remember it accurately. There was no apparent reason for this since he obviously could not have known or even wildly guessed that the person framed in the doorway would have any importance to him in the future, any reason for remembering. As an example of this, he could not remember and, for that matter, she could not remember, except by reconstruction, by intelligent guessing, where

he had first met his wife. But as he (the later Ralston again) remembered sitting in that chair facing the open door of The Birdcage, the buzz of the conversation (the alto sax was doing a solo about cowboy movies), the slant of the sunlight (which by now did not hit the bar at all but rather the floor below the bar), the real jukebox (which was two thirds through Chet Baker' s record of Funny Valentine), even the time which had been so inexact for the rest of the memory but which was now exactly (if one ignored the fact that bar clocks are always inaccurate) twelve minutes of five. It was ridiculous the motionlessness of this memory, and yet, in it, the figure came moving through the doorway.

First came the hands (as memory Picasso-like tried to reproduce in flat space the movement of his impression), thin enormous hands, and then the beer glass that the hands were carrying, a different, larger beer glass than those used at The Birdcage (logic told him that it must have been the beer glass that located his attention to the hands -- but no, the hands came first). Framed behind the hands and the beer glass, subsidiary for the moment, was the rest of the body, elongated and gangling, a face in which he saw mainly curves and thinness -- and youth, of course, he must be only eighteen or nineteen but that came behind the rest of it in the picture, a corduroy jacket, huge faded khaki pants that came not quite to his ankles and yet (he had no belt) were two sizes too large for him at the waist. He was looking at Ralston too, curiously, as if he were surprised that he too was making a permanent recording of his impressions. There was no element of sexual attraction, Ralston thought, in this exchange of, what was it, recognitions, not even of the unidentified erotic which can pass, unexpected and meaningless, between any two creatures like a bolt of heat lightning in the summer sky. It was merely -- no, Ralston did not understand it then and remembering it later he still did not, would not, understand it.

The others at the table now had seen him. "Rue," they called. Unhurried and awkward he walked over to where they were sitting and sat down in an empty chair next to Ralston' s. "Hello," he said to each of them with a somber politeness which seemed radically out of place in this bar -- and then to Ralston, "I' m Rudolf Talcott."

Ralston extended his hand, "I' m Jim Ralston."

"You must be really making it," Petersen said to the boy, "He told us his name was W. H. Auden. He bought us a pitcher of beer though. Will you buy us another pitcher now we know your real name?"

"I' m sorry," Ralston said. "I only buy people beer when my name is W. H. Auden."

The boy sat sipping the beer he had carried in with him. He seemed neither amused nor annoyed at the interchange. Petersen turned his attention back to him. "You got some bread, Rue? You got enough bread to buy us a pitcher or a glass?"

The boy half-turned toward Petersen. "You scrounge everybody," he said. "You' d scrounge God if you could catch him."

Washington Jones laughed a long deep laugh, again disclosing his un-Negro teeth in the process. "That' d be really something wouldn' t it, boy, to make old Papa Daddy pay for a beer. And John' s just the man to do it. A real God-catcher." He paused and looked at Rue, "No bread, really? We ought to do

something to pay back Mr. W. H. Ralston' s kindness here."

"Don' t bother about me," Ralston said. He rose abruptly and went to the lavatory and then to the bar to get another bottle of ale. When he returned he was disappointed to find that the conversation was exactly where he left it. Gregory was telling about a party which had evidently taken place in someone' s kitchen at five o' clock on the previous morning. He, then each of the others in turn, summarized the events of what must have been, it seemed to Ralston, a very hectic and very dull party, a party which might, and Ralston suspected that it did, have its only justification in that its events could be talked about, be edited collectively into some kind of coherence, in a bar on the next afternoon.

"And so Sonia said, ' You' re the kind that never really makes it, the kind who can' t stand for there to be a great artist, the kind that killed Bird' and then she threw a plate of scrambled eggs in his face."

"And most of them fell in Harry Winter' s lap."

"I don' t remember any of this. I must have been really out of it. David had given me five bennies and --"

"--then the stud that owned the pad came in with the landlord and --"

"--but there was still something left in the gallon winejug and--"

On and on they went in their relaxed Wonderland language, the boy next to Ralston neither more or less a part of the session (it more like a dull modern jazz record than ever, Ralston thought) than any of the rest of the combo. Clichès of excitement, secondhand enthusiasms, Ralston wondered why he felt so bitterly disappointed, so betrayed. Suddenly the boy turned to Ralston. "You hate things like that, don' t you," he said.

"Not things like that, Rue," Ralston was immediately conscious of the ridiculousness of calling him by name. "Not things like that but the trying to put meaning into them afterwards."

"If you' re going to talk you' ll have to buy beer for us," Petersen said.

"Trying to make a mythology out of the dreadful scraps of you lives," Ralston continued as if he had heard nothing, conscious that this was probably his last chance to make a speech, "and making the scraps deliberately meaningless so that you' ll have more fun picking them up afterwards."

"Don' t put us down," Gregory said. "I hate it when people start putting people down. Like Curtis when he' s drunk," he added, seemingly certain that the explanation would be as clear to Ralston as to everybody else.

"The gentleman that my friend Mr. Taxon is talking about," the tall Negro said from the distant superiority of his side of the table, "is a Flat Rock kiddie named Curtis Stein who always denounces our meaninglessness when he gets very lushed. Then he usually knocks a table over and passes out. I don' t really see the similarity."

"I didn' t mean to put him down or Curtis either --" Gregory began, but the Negro stopped him in mid-sentence by raising one hand. "I' m sure you didn' t," he said. "I was about to tell Mr. Ralston here that since he seems prepared to use our familiar names -- and it is very kind of him to do so -- that I am usually known as Judge and my friends here are known respectively as Greg and John the Scrounge. It is only proper to call us by our familiar names in any discussion of our faults."

"He was talking to me," Rue said and turned fully to face Ralston. "Do

you know a better way of going about it?" he asked. Ralston knew that he was back to their conversation and that he was asking the question perfectly seriously for information rather as someone would ask about a special way of preparing bacon and eggs.

Three thoughts occurred to Ralston almost simultaneously -- that he should not sound like a schoolteacher when he answered the question, that he really did not, or why was he here, have the answer to the question, and that, if he did not answer the question, a whole world of confusing possibility might be cut off from him. "I don't know," he said, and then the devil of his schoolteacher honesty made him add, "I'm not at all sure but I think that you take the normal fragments of life and try to make them meaningful. I think that anything besides that is cheating."

"Why?" The question in the boy's voice was still on the bacon and eggs level. So far Ralston was right.

"Because," and suddenly Ralston could not think of the reason; it was like forgetting what you were going to say in class, Ralston thought in the few seconds that it took him to stutter, "Because," and then the schoolteacher, the poet who, Ralston thought later, could almost literally not afford to be at a loss for words took over. "Because billions of people are being born, marrying, and dying in much the same way. Because you live or write about those things to try to make them clearer. Nothing else."

"Just better glasses to wear? Not a different room?"

"All the rooms are the same."

"Shit!" Anger, disappointment, and frustration were all in the boy's voice. Then his voice changed and it became the voice of a member of the modern jazz combo, of the Mad Tea Party. "May I look at this for a moment?" he asked, pointing to the copy of Partisan Review which was still in front of Ralston on the table.

Before Ralston could say yes or even wonder at the change in his voice, the boy had taken up the thick magazine. He held it for a moment in his huge hands and then, like someone doing a trick with a telephone book at a party, tore the whole lengthwise and crosswise in two quick motions. It was so quick and so, it seemed at the time, natural a gesture that Ralston could first only think of the strength of the hands that were doing it.

Then anger came. Anger was always a delayed emotion with Ralston. He would often know intellectually that he would be angry, he should be angry, before he actually could be. For what seemed like five minutes but what was actually, he was sure, no more than five seconds, he surveyed the scene like some great prehistoric beast whose nervous system is too sluggish to convey to his brain the pain of a death wound his eye could already see. The anger came. "Damn you," he said. "Damn all of you. Snotnosed little boys tearing up things you don't understand. When I come in next time I'll bring along some pretty books for you to burn and some paintings you can slash." He stood towering over them in the fullness of his anger.

Rue stood up too, "I--"

"Baby," Ralston shouted. "Playing on the floor with rattles and wine bottles."

Rue's face had turned white. Ralston could see it more clearly, in his

anger, than at any time that afternoon. It was the face of a beautiful marionette, a haunted doll, staring whitely down at him from the distance between their heights. Then, with a gesture of his hands Ralston could not interpret, he walked, slowly, jerkily, out of the bar.

"You really shook him up," Washington Jones said. "The gentleman is really shook up."

"Excuse me," Ralston said, looking down at those remaining at the table from a great distance. "Excuse me." He picked up his glass and went over to the bar to finish his ale and his anger.

He not only finished that ale but had at least another as well. Later when he tried to figure out how long he had been there at the bar alone (and it became important to discover this in order to explain the conjuring trick that followed) Ralston could not tell if he had been there ten or forty minutes. His sense of time was usually connected to (or perhaps measure by) the changing pattern of his thoughts -- and his thoughts had been meaningless, not incoherent but meaningless. He doubted that at any one minute during that time he could have told himself what he had been thinking about at the minute before.

Ten or forty minutes. And then he heard loud voices from the table behind him. "What you got there, Rue?" Petersen's and Jones'. "My God, he's got a fish in his hand. Look, a fish!"

He looked in the bar mirror and saw the boy coming toward him. His face was full of color now and he was carrying a fish in his right hand, Ralston saw as he came closer to the bar, a fairly large black fish. Ralston turned. Rue advanced toward him and put the fish down gently on the bar next to Ralston's ale glass.

"Here," he said. "This is for you."

Ralston looked at the fish which was flapping a little on the bar, not quite dead. It looked even larger now it was out of Rue's hand. One horrible open eye stared up at him.

"Look," the boy said. "Look in his mouth."

In the fish's mouth tightly folded was a piece of paper. Ralston sat staring, not moving a muscle.

"Take it out. Read it. It's for you."

The fish's dying mouth opened and closed slightly making the paper move. Ralston, fascinated between horror and anger, extended his hand and gently removed it.

"It's for you," the boy repeated.

Ralston unfolded the wedge of paper. It was, he could see, two pages of poetry written in large childish handwriting. Without allowing himself to read so much as a word of what was written, he folded over the pages once and then methodically began to tear the paper to shreds.

"See," Ralston said, "I can tear paper too."

The boy watched the pieces of paper flutter down to the floor. He looked as if he were going to cry. "It was a poem," he said softly. "You bastard. Oh, you bastard." Almost as a single movement he grabbed the fish in his hand and ran out of the door. Ralston waited for a moment then stumbled out of the bar himself, in what he hoped was the other direction.

Jack Spicer: LETTERS TO JIM ALEXANDER

Fort Wayne, Indiana, is the capitol of Nitrogen. All streets end there. No buses arrive there except those that carry direct mail or cargoes of Negores en route on the Underground Railway. There has never been a city made up of so many arms.

You can see Troy, New York, in the distance.

Christmas poems and lovers' holly branches grow there in the winter as well as stuffings of turkeys, memory pie, and little droppings of passing angels. It is not reached by air.

Fort Wayne, Indiana, has industries and tournament golf, and blocks and blocks of weeping buildings. It is built on high ground above the slough of utter unwinding.

The birds which all look like seagulls or cormorants in its articifical sky finish singing when the day is over. At night they look like elephants. People watch them with telescopes as they hover.

In Fort Wayne, Indiana the trees are dying and you can see footprints in the rather wet snow. People take their motor scooters to bed with them.

Come back to California, come back to California every map-maker, every map-maker is pleading to James James Alexander.

"What do the sparrows eat in the winter?" I asked someone once in Minneapolis. He replied, "They eat horse turds if they can find them."

There are acres of cold snow.

Love,

Jack

Railroad trains lost their balance and buses stood on their hind ends and licked their wounded wheels when James Alexander came back to California.

And poor airplans dripped sweat from their wings and little cars mooed as if they were not quite convinced they were mechanical.

When James Alexander came back to California he and the other poet who exists in the universe formulated a series of true propositions:

THAT POETRY ALONE CAN LOVE POETRY
THAT POEMS CRY OUT TO EACH OTHER FROM A GREAT DISTANCE
THAT POETS, BEING BASTARD FATHERS, LOVE EACH OTHER LIKE BASTARD FATHERS WHEN THEY SEE THEIR CHILDREN PLAYING TOGETHER
THAT POEMS PLAY TOGETHER FROM A GREAT DISTANCE

It was made illegal for a bachelor to watch poems.

When James Alexander came back to California they hunted mushrooms together in the cold rocks of the Berkeley Hills.

They invented a game which was more complicated than bridge or chess or football which was played with gum and chalk and a piece of common wrapping paper.

They made it utterly impossible to identify God.

Having a hand in each other' s hand, they walked down every street on which it was possible to walk, having the pavements dictated to them by an angel.

They purged history of contemporary reference.

They wrote poetry that had to be looked at from a distance on a gigantic playground. Their children split words

The scholars who found these children died in agony.

One thumb opposed one thumb, each thumb was the center of the universe.

They forged a lost manuscript of Rimbaud' s La Chasse Spirituelle for their own purposes. It was mysteriously discovered to have been written in English.

They found that they had one tongue
We shall find that we have one tongue
I hope that we shall find that we have one tongue.

Love Jack

Dear James,

I don' t know if there is room in the world for a postoffice but you come across ' em often enough, if you don' t make the mistake of pretending that they' re in a fixed place (like the moon) and if you don' t let their continual changes bewilder you.

It' s rather like hunting mushrooms. They grow in certain places and you can never be sure where their (certain) places will be after the next rain but you get a sense of where they won' t be and don' t go there. Unless, of course, they tell you.

The letters, poems, kisses (since the original game of postoffice is stuck in the mysterious regions of childhood) are directed by a fantastically inefficient system up to the place where poetry comes from and then back down again to the person whose poetry, or letters, or love was meant to receive it. It is a lot different from Air Mail.

And it is almost impossible to list the random places from which they will deliver their letters. A box of shredded wheat, a drunken comment, a big piece of paper, a shadow meaningless except as a threat or a communication, a throat.

Believe them all but obey the postofficers who tell you when to believe them or obey them.

If you don' t have money for the money order why not send me the pawntickets (I have money for a few months) and I will send you pawntickets with the equivalents of a watch and a typewriter upon them. The real pawntickets are letters.

Love

Jack

Dear James,

Went down to Duncan and Jess' s Friday to read them the letters. Their house is built mainly of Oz books, a grate to burn wood, a second story for guests, paintings, poems, and miscellaneous objects of kindly magic. Cats. It is a place where I am proud (we are proud) to read the letters. It is a postoffice.

I had not realized how little alone one is in a postoffice. Before I had merely posted the letters and wondered.

It is possible if you have the humility to create a household and the sense to tread on all pieces of bag magic as soon as they appear to create a postoffice. It is as mechanical as Christmas.

Late at night (we drank a gallon of wine and talked about the worlds that had to be included into our poetry -- Duncan wanted me to send Creeley the letters because Creeley, he said, needed the letters -- and I went to bed upstairs with George MacDonald' s Lilith) I had to piss and walked down the outside stairs and saw (or heard but I think I saw) the ocean and the moonless stars that filled the sky so full of light I understood size for the first time. They seemed, while I was pissing away the last of the wine and the conversation, a part of the postoffice too.

This I promise -- that if you come back to California I will show you where they send letters -- all of them, the poems and the ocean. The invisible

Love

Jack

It is not the monotony of nature but the poems beyond nature that call to each other above the poets' heads. The heads of poets being a part of nature. It is not for us to make the lines of nature precise. It is for the poems to make the lines of nature precise. Because of their fatal attraction for the lines of nature, for our heads.

We proclaim a silent revolution. The poems above our heads, without tongues, are tired of talking to each other over the gabble of our beliefs, our literary personalities, our attempts to project their silent conversation to an audience. When we give tongue we amplify. We are telephone switchboards deluded into becoming hi-fi sets. The terrible speaks must be allowed silence. They are not speaking to us.

How is it then our business to talk of revolution -- we heads of poets one named Jack and one named James, three in the distance named Ebbe, Charles, and Robert? It is because we as their victims, as their mouthpiece must learn to become complete victims, complete pieces of their mouth. We must learn that our lips are not our own. A revolution is a savage education.

There are people that talk about poetry like tired insurance clerks talk about baseball. They must be destroyed by our silence. Even the hatred of them interrupts the conversation that our poems wish to continue. Even the mention of them makes it me talking, crashes into paradox what was their truth.

We do not write for each other. We are irritable radio sets (but the image of the talking head of a horse on the wall in Cocteau' s first Orpheus was a truer image) but our poems write for each other, being full of their own purposes, no doubt no more mysterious in their universe than ours in ours. And our lips are not our lips. But are the lips of heads of poets. And should shout revolution.

In silence.

Love

Jack

Dear James,

It is absolutely clear and absolutely sunny as if neither a cloud nor a moon had even been invented. I am laying here on the grass of the University of California, a slave-state but one which today seems peculiarly beneficent. I have not had a letter from you in weeks.

I read them all (your letters and mine) to the poets assembled for the occasion last Wednesday. Ebbe was annoyed since he thought that letters should remain letters (unless they were essays) and poems poems (a black butterfly just flew past my leg) and that the universe of the personal and the impersonal should be kept in order. George Stanley thought that I was robbing Jim to pay James. They sounded beautiful -- all of them.

Things cannot die in such a spring (unless the old men of the world commit suicide (our suicide) over the question of whether East Germans be called East Germans in diplomatic notes) and every leaf and flower of this red-hot February asks me to remember this. Though it is on the other side of poetry, spring, thank whatever created both of them, is spring. And I am not sure on a day like this that the living and dying world does not have something analogous to poetry in it. That every flower and every leaf (properly read) is not a James as well as a Jim.

Things cannot die in such a spring and yet your silence (for the spring itself proclaims that there are such things as clouds and moons) frightens me when I close my eyes or begin to write a poem.

I wish you were with me now on this grass and could be with me like the leaves and the flowers and the grass a part of this spring. Jim and James.

Love

Jack

Dear James,

The only place I' ve found to retire into is your watch. I haven' t covered it with bark and it is in no sense beautiful, but I haven' t worn a watch in two years and I talk to it (mostly about you and what it was like to be worn on your wrist) and sometimes I spend a few seconds watching its second hand stuttering by (green and nervous) and it really is, all things considered, a natural object like a tree or a flower or a bark covered table. A postoffice.

And the watch believes what I tell it. "There are two kinds of places in the world," it wants me to tell you, "pawnshops and postoffices." You will find it hard to reeducate.

I don' t like my poetry either. I read a new poem last Wednesday and nobody said much of anything and I asked why and Duncan said it was because it was a very good Jack Spicer poem and I threw the poem in the garbage sack not tearing the poem because it was a very good Jack Spicer poem. The watch was ticking on my wrist all the time and was not a Jack Spicer wristwatch and would never be a Jack Spicer wristwatch and that should be the way with the poems.

It' s rather like a medium (a real medium) who gets a spirit, call her Little Eva, to control her. Pretty soon, after a few sessions, she' ll get to know what Little Eva is going to say and start saying it for her. Then it' s no longer a seance but fakery and time to change spooks.

That' s what your watch tells me, TIME TO CHANGE SPOOKS!

I don' t know what your table tells you, but if you came back to California we might arrange a favorable exchange of spooks. Like the Giants and the Cardinals.

Love

Jack

Dear James,

This letter is entirely from the other Jack, the nervous worried guy who puts letters into envelopes and receives them from same. The other Jack, the one who wrote you all the letters, is puzzled about the change of postoffices. This Jack, me, being more practical, is wondering.

(A) Did you receive his last letter (about watch, p.o. vs pawnshop, ghost-trading etc.) before letters of 31st, 1st ult? Or at all?

(B) Is someone reading and destroying his letters because if so don't because is harmless to the real world insofar as poetry is harmless to the real world. Which is not so far.

Or (C) What?

He, the other Jack, is probably asleep. I hate him sometimes.

He (it was really my suggestion) on account of (B) is sending this letter from the address of an imaginary little magazine. We have both still our own.

Love (insofar as I can say it too)

Jack

The mirror does not break easily regardless of what is reflected in it, regardless of whether there are blue apples, Rimbaud, or even angry white light belonging in it, imprisoned, one might say, in the death of its surface. It is the oblique patience of an Alice who plays with her cat and waits for something between her and the image to melt it away. It is the oblique patience of children.

When you rush bravely against the mirror shouting "This is also my universe" you are likely merely to get a bloody nose. That surface has no patience with violence. Even as these letters are our mirrors and we imprisoned singly in the depths of them.

So it is (the violence of the impatient artist) that I keep trying to draw the form of these letters to a close merely because I am going to read them to an audience of boobies and one or two poets. Ridiculous attempt to break the glass! The letters will continue. The letters will continue after both of us are dead. The letters would continue even if we were in the same room together, even though our faces were so close that we could hardly speak -- or so distant that our hearts could not touch.

Mirror breaker! I simply do not have the patience merely to let the mirror dissolve. I keep tapping my hand on it. Help me!

Love

Jack

Dear James,

I' ll not explain the mistakes the other Jack made in the last letter. They' re obvious. And I' m sure they belong to the poetry of it somewhere too.

I am glad that you' re not going to New York. Letters sent to there or received from there would be filled with worms. Any other city. But, of course, if you come here there will be a double advantage for if Jim and the other Jack can' t talk to each other and won' t let James and Jack talk to each other (unlikely because of the bridge of love we have erected between us but possible God knows) we can still, defying the both of them, send letters to each other from the same city. Which would be an unnatural as poetry often is.

Our letters again will cross. Your watch will count out the days and hours of the month. As our letters will.

Love

Jack

Dear James,

It was not really the thought of reading them (because I didn' t, not on Valentine' s Day which would be a threat of perfection, but tomorrow to poets at one of those poetry meetings that were in your time Sundays) but as the prose stretches like a big rubber ball with no middle to it, but the hoverings and threats of evil (do you understand magic or do I have to teach it to you?) that made me lean on the death of our letters. It is a black thing evil is, having nothing to do with good and bad, or even beautiful and fucked up, having much more to do with the inside and outside of a man than good does.

The opposite of it is poetry or pajamas or Paracelsus or anything else in the universe that begins with P.

Magic begins with M and is neutral. So does man, more, much, me, made, middle, meetings, and the last half of tomorrow. Evil denies that this could even be an alphabet.

This is so near to the truth that I don' t want to finish the letter. Love that begins with an L like my heart does

Love

Jack

Dear Jim,

I am writing this letter to you rather than James as it is a Christmas letter and both he and I would find it uncomfortable -- like saying Merry Christmas to Rimbaud. You, on the other hand, having several faces will be able to select a face appropriate to its reception.

Religion is the shadow of the obvious -- and all the paraphenalia of Christmas from the Christ child to the Sante Claus selling ties in a department-store window is just this -- religion -- the infinite shadow that a false beard or a plaster child can cast. What is under that book lying face downward on the bed or that green radio on the floor? Whatever it is disappears when you pick the object up, but on holidays you can see the shadow that the thing casts. That is why a real Child is born on Christmas, why there <u>is</u> a Santa Claus.

Why am I writing to you to tell you about this? It is because I am afraid that you may be too young to believe and James too busy to believe in this holiday, that you may confuse the shadows with the things that cast them and believe that there is nothing there. This is not important to James, to the poet who can watch in his own poetry something even more than these shadows -- but it is you I am wishing Merry Christmas.

Tell James: I am reading my poetry in public on February 14th and at it reading all his letters.

Jack

In the Grand Pyramid they buried the king with all his bottles, postage stamps, and half-eaten loaves of bread. Were they really the king's, Cocteau asks us in his article on Memory, or were they manufactured for the occasion?

No one knows better than I do how lonely you are.

In the Grand Pyramid there are the most complicated mathematical systems and the most complicated moral systems and chains of amythest and diamond hanging just out of reach. It is the center of the universe.

Were they invented for the occasion?

In the Grand Pyramid it is darker than it even was and the king is still there. The king communicates by magic and he tells me "Build a pyramid for yourself" and he tells you, "Find a postage stamp" and he eats a little of the bread and drinks a little from the bottles he has manufactured.

The postage stamp has a picture of the Grand Pyramid engraved on it; the pyramid has not been yet invented.

No one knows how lonely you are better than I do.

*

Jack Spicer:

from THE VANCOUVER LECTURES

1 (June 13, 1965

Jack: Well, I really ought to explain the structure of the three lecture-readings -- more than was on the flyer that some of you saw -- essentially what' s going to happen is that in each reading I' m going to read some of my work -- in each reading there' s going to be a discussion of the problems that have to do with poets -- as far as I see what the problems are with poets -- and they' re pretty much in order of importance. I think the problem of Poetic Dictation is perhaps the first problem a poet has. The second problem -- one that you really can' t get too well without understanding what poetic dictation is or isn' t -- is the serial poem. And the third lecture on Thursday night will be -- a sort of -- I' m not sure if it' s an autopsy -- or a looking at the growth of the poem I' m writing now -- the problems of the person in the middle of the poem -- what comes up to make things different. In other words I' m rather assuming that all of you are interested directly as poets in the writing of poetry. And I' m not going to talk about aesthetic theory except where I think it has something to do with the problems of anyone writing poetry -- and what I am going to do tonight and in future nights is to -- oh, yes, well, immediately this is wrong -- Warren, the light is supposed to be off unless I am reading some poems -- as I was about to explain, the light will be off except when I' m reading poems -- and immediately I looked up and found the light was on -- a fine start for everything! Now, when the light is off and I' m discussing this, I want you to interrupt with questions, rude remarks, anything else -- when I' m reading the poems, I don' t.

Now the business tonight on poetic dictation is rather an interesting time to have it discussed. It' s Yeat' s birthday. He' d be 100 today if he weren' t up there with the big skywriters in the sky. Yeats is probably the first modern who took the idea of dictation seriously, and he might be a good person to start out from, seeing as how, although I don' t know why a birthday should be so important -- it still is his birthday.

He was on a train, back in 1918 -- a train oddly enough going through San Bernadino to Los Angeles, when his wife -- he' d married at the age of 45 -- something like that -- a rather rich woman who everyone thought he married just because she was a rich woman, and Lady Gregory was getting old and was not about to will him money -- Georgie, suddenly began to have trances -- and spooks came to her. She was in the tradition of the Psychic Research Society and all of that, and so they would naturally come in a form the Psychic Research Society would think spooks would come in. And she started automatic writing

as they were going through the orange groves between San Berdoo and Los Angeles. And Yeats didn't know what to make of it for a while, but it was a slow train and he started getting interested -- and the spooks were talking to him. He still, I'm sure, thought that Georgie was doing all this to divert him -- he probably was in a nasty mood after having gone across the country on the Southern Pacific -- which I imagine in those days was even worse than it is now. But, he finally decided he'd ask a question or two of the spooks as Georgia was in a trance. And he asked a rather good question -- he asked, "What are you here for?" And the spooks replied, "We are here to give metaphors for your poetry."

Well, now that's something which is in all English Department lectures now, and everything else, but it was the first thing since Blake on the business of taking poetry as coming from the outside rather than from the inside. In other words, instead of the poet being a beautiful machine which manufactured the current for itself, did everything for itself, almost a perpetual motion machine, of emotion, until the poet's heart broke, or was burned on the beach like Shelley's. Instead there was something from the outside coming in.

Now the difference between, "We have come to bring metaphors for your poetry," and what I think most poets -- who I consider good poets -- today believe -- and this would include people as opposite in their own ways as, say, Eliot on one hand, and Duncan on the other -- is essentially that there is an outside to the poet -- now what the outside is like is described differently by different poets, and some of them believe that there's a welling up of the subconscious or the racial memory, or the this or the that, and they try to put it inside the poet. Others take it from the outside -- Olson's idea of energy in Projective Verse -- something that comes from the outside. I think that the source is unimportant, but I think that for the poet writing poetry, the idea of just what the poet is, in relationship to this outside -- whether it's an id down in the cortex -- which you can't reach anyway, it's just as far outside as Mars -- or whether it is as far away as those galaxies that seem to be sending radio messages to us with the whole galaxy blowing up just to say something to us, which are in the papers all the time now -- What are they called? 'Quasods' or -- [Voice: Quasistars.] Yeah, something like that. But at any rate, the first step is reached, I think, with Yeats' getting the thing -- But the way that it works -- "We have come to bring metaphors for your poetry" -- this is like "We have come to bring fertilizer for your fields" -- that kind of thing. You know, "Well, you've had such nice poetry, Mr. Yeats, the spooks have come down from above to give you metaphors to hang it onto."

Now this is not really what happens -- in my own experience -- and I'll be talking about my own experience most of the time, but I think I can say for other people's experiences too, of those that I know -- in dictated poetry -- I think that the first kind of hint one has as a poet, and I must confess I was, as Karen would say, a 'retard' in this respect, is -- after you have written poems for a while and struggled with them, and everything else, a poem comes through just in about one-eighth of the time that a poem normally does, and you say, "Well, gee, it's going to be much easier if I can just have this happen very often." And so then you write 17 or 18 different things which are just what you're thinking about at the moment -- and are lousy.

It isn't simply the matter of being able to get a fast take -- It's something else -- But the fast take is a good sign that you're hooked up with some source of power, some source of energy. Then, the next thing is you suddenly figure out, well, gee, when I've been wanting something, I've been, ah -- say I'm in love, and I want to sleep with this person, and, you know, the normal thing is with the fast take you write all these things down -- with an idea of -- essentially a way of selling a used car. And this doesn't work.

So one day, after you have this first experience, which was just something that you coudln't imagine, and the poems haven't come this clean, this fast -- and they don't usually in dictated poetry anyway -- suddenly there comes a poem that you just hate and would like to get rid of, that says just exactly the opposite of what you mean, of what you have to say -- to use Olson's thing in one of its two meanings. Olson talks about the poet is a poet when he says what he has to say. Now, you can read that two ways. What he HAS to say, namely, "I want to sleep with you, honey." Or, "I think that the Vietnam crisis is terrible," or, "Some of my best friends are dying in loony bins," or whatever you want to say that you think is a particular message -- that's the bad thing. But what you WANT to say -- the business of the wanting come from the outside, like it wants five dollars -- being ten dollars -- that kind of want is the kind of thing which is the real thing -- the thing that you didn't want to say in terms of your own ego -- in terms of your image, in terms of your life, in terms of everything. And I think the second step for a poet who's going on to the poetry of dictation is when he finds out that these poems which say just exactly the opposite of what he wants himself, per se, poet, to say, the poems that say just exactly the opposite -- if you want to say something about your beloved's eyebrows and the poem says, the eyes should fall out -- and you don't really want the eyes to fall out, or have any even cague connection -- or you're trying to write a poem on Vietnam and you write a poem about skating in Vermont -- these things, again, begin to show you just exactly where the road of dictation leads. But then you -- just like when you wrote the first poem which came easily and yet was a good poem, a poem beyond you, the second stage -- you then say, "Oh, well then, you know, I'll just write this thing, and I'll take a line from someplace or another, or use a Dada or Surrealist thing (in a different way than I'm going to use the word surrealism tonight -- but the French Surrealist way of placing things together -- taking the arbitrary and all of that) -- and that won't be what I want to say -- and so that'll be great, that'll be hunky-dory." Unfortunately that doesn't work terribly well either. You have to -- not really want -- not what you don't want to say. It's a very complicated kind of thing. You can't play tricks on it. That's the second stage.

The third stage, I think, comes when you get some idea that there is a difference between you and the outside of you which is writing poetry -- where you feel less proud of the poem that you've written, and you know damn well that it belongs to somebody else... then you start seeing whether you can clear your mind away -- from the things which are you, the things that you want, and everything else -- the poem then, and for a poem sometimes it's a twelve-hour struggle to get a ten-line poem, not changing a single word of it as you're writing, but just as it goes along -- trying to distinguish between you and the poem -- the absolute distinction between the outside and the inside -- and here

the analogy of the medium comes in, which Yeats started out, and which Cocteau in his Orphee -- both the play and the picture -- used a car radio for, but which is essentially the same thing. But essentially you are something which is being transmitted into. And the more that you clear the mind away from yourself -- and the more also that you do some censoring, because there will be all sorts of things coming from your mind, from the depth of your mind, from things that you want, which will foul up the poem. For example, mediums always have to have the accent that they were born with. There was a medium who is supposed to have been in contact with Oscar Wilde -- I think that mediums are almost always, if not always, fake. But just pretend that mediums were real -- because some of them may be -- particularly in primitive tribes. She got all sorts of epigrams and they came out in Cockney because she only spoke Cockney. Now, if you have a cleft palate and are trying to speak with the tongue of men and angels, you' re gonna still speak through a cleft palate. And things which are in you, the poem comes distorted through. Your tongue is exactly the kind of tongue that you' re born with, and the source of energy, whatever it is, can take advantage of your tongue, can make it do things that you didn' t think it could -- but your tongue will want to return to the same normal position of ordinary cleft palate speech of your own dislect, and this is the kind of thing you have to avoid. There are a great many things you can' t avoid. It' s impossible for the source of energy to come to you in Martian or North Korean or Tamil or any language you don' t know -- it' s impossible for the source of energy to use images you don' t have -- or at least, don' t have something of. It' s as if a Martian comes into a room with children' s blocks -- with ABCDE, which are in English -- and he tries to convey a message -- this is the way the source of energy goes -- but the blocks on the other hands are always resisting it.

Now, the third step in dictated poetry is to try to keep all of yourself that is possible out of the poem. And whenever there' s a line that you like particularly well, which expresses just how you' re feeling at the particular moment -- which seems just lovely -- then be so goddamned suspicious of it that you wait for two or three hours before you put it down on paper. This is practical advice and also advice that makes you stay up all night -- unfortunately. But -- you will find yourself, even if you' re not interested in poems as dictation, that the lines that you liked best -- when you wrote them, and so forth, two or three years later -- you see that they were the ones that screwed up the poem. The poem was going one way and you had this beautiful line -- Gee, it was a lovely line -- just expressed how you felt at that particular moment -- Oh, Lord, how lovely -- but at the same time you are stuck with language, and you are stuck with words, and you are stuck with the things that you know. It' s very nice thing, and a difficult thing. The more you know, the more languages you know... the more building blocks the Martians have to play with.

It' s harder too, because an uneducated person often can write a better poem than an educated person, simply because there are only so many building blocks, so many ways of arranging them -- and after that you' re through, the things, I mean, behind you are through -- and it can make for simplicity as in good ballads -- American and English... in the long run, for really just good

poetry and sometimes really great poetry -- an infinitely small vocabulary is what you want -- and perhaps that would be the ideal -- except for the fact it' s pretty hard to write a poem that way. But, the more building blocks, the more you have to arrange your building blocks and say to the Martian, "Oh no, Mr. Martian, it doesn' t go this way -- ... that spelling ' prydl' doesn' t make any sense in English at all -- we' ll change it around..." -- then you make an anagram of it and you spoil what the Martian was trying to say, and the more building blocks you have the more temptation. The more you know (in a university sense) the more temptation there is to say, Oh, yes, yes, yes, yes, I remember this had to do with the Trojan War, and this has to do with this and this has to do with that. But on the other hand, given a source of energy, which you can direct, and you can direct yourself out of the picture, then given a cooperation between the host, the poet, and the visitor, the thing from outside, the more things you have in the room, the better. If you can handle them in such a way that you don' t impose your will on what is coming through, and that' s the whole problem of -- well -- of the kind of thing which you have in modern poetry, the fact that most poets from say 19 to 27, that I know, who are good, in San Francisco, are really against education because they know that education is essentially going to fuck them up because they can' t resist -- that if they have all of these benches and chairs in the room -- not to arrange them themselves, instead of letting them be arranged by whatever is the source of the poem.

... Creeley talks about poems following the dictation of language. It seems to me that' s nonsense -- language is part of the furniture in the room. Language isn' t anything of itself -- it' s something which is in the mind of the host, the parasite that the poem is invading -- five languages just makes the room structure more difficult and also possibly, more usable. It certainly doesn' t have anything to do with any mystique of English or anything else. Duncan' s business of words and their shadows, and sounds and their shadows seems to me again, taking things which are in the room, rather than things which are coming into the room, and it seems to me essentially that you arrange -- when you get a beautiful thing which uses the words and shadows of the words, and the fact silly once meant blessed instead of silly as it now does, you ought to be distrustful -- although at the same time, the thing which invades you from the outside can use it. Now, the other kind of thing, other than Olson' s ' energy' , which, I think, Olson looks on as sort of -- energy to him, it' s not something from a great galactic distance out -- it' s something you plug in the wall -- and it' s really the machine which is the convertor of the electricity which makes another machine work, and so forth. And I don' t agree with that either, but I' d go nearer to that. And then there' s finally [Williams] who sees in objects, essentially, a kind of energy which radiates from them, the fact that this chair has a chairness, a nimbus around it, a kind of electrical thing, which gives energy enough so that it can be transformed almost directly, if the thing that chair in its chairness radiates -- into poetry -- and all of these things I think are perfectly useful explanations of it. I prefer more the unknown.

Well, now this is an introduction to the whole problem. Now, I would like to see whether I can get some questions from you people before I start out on

the Textbook of Poetry, which in some ways contradicts some of the things I've said, but it's right where I'm wrong. ...

Q: If a poet were to listen to what you've said, on tape, and -- "no, this is all wrong. I do it myself." Is he not writing poetry then?

J: Well now, which is all wrong?

Q: The whole idea, this whole sense of medium, of the poet as host to the visitor. Now, I'm the visitor myself, as well as I control everything and nothing else out of me controls it.

J: Do you really feel that completely in your poetry?

Q: No, this is a hypothetical situation.

J: Well, yeah, I just have never met a poet who has gone beyond just, you know, the first couple of years of poetry that would say that, really, including academic poets. I mean, even academic poets -- I think, would -- they'd have some high-faluting thing. They'd quote Coleridge and all of that. But essentailly, I don't think anyone who is a practicing poet, even a practicing bad poet, who had done it for a long enough time, would disagree with the fact that there is something from the outside. I mean you get this in -- Longinus, for Christ's sake, all of these pretty square people going all the way back -- St. Thomas Aquinas says it -- and you can't have anyone who's farther away from poetry than him. And, no... but I do think an awful lot of poets feel it sort of at their back, but they'd really rather express themselves. This poem is me. I am this poem. You know, and so forth --

Q: Maybe that's more what I meant -- that it's behind you, and you write a poem that you know damn well is you -- and you're not letting it come in. Is that a poem? ...Is that the only possible source that one connects up...

J: Well, can you think of a poet that would demonstrate that, sort of -- I'm a real practical person, and these 'iffy' questions, as President Roosevelt used to say -- you know, if your aunt had balls she'd be your uncle -- No, but I mean, say Pope, for example, who would seem to be a person who kept his own identity all the way through. You take the great things of Pope's The Rape of the Lock for example. There are some things which come through that you just would swear that this little hunchback, who was interested in politics, could not have written. And this must have scared the hell out of him. And the kind of wit which just -- is the kind of wit only a ghost could make -- "Why has man not a microscopic eye? For this good reason, man is not a fly." I mean I really do think that it's probably true for all the arts, but I think it is true for poetry that anyone who is doing more than just dabbling on the surface -- trying to write diaries essentially, and so forth, had this feeling and he, even if he tries to resist it, it's pretty hard.

Q: Well, Jack, in Duncan' s poem, " Two Presentations", he mentions the Hindu girl on the bus... Can this come from other people, or does it come from out of the blue?

J: Well now that' s another thing which probably should be mentioned here, I think Robin Blaser' s poetry... is an example of this. I think myself, from what I' ve seen, that there' s no question that objective events can be caused in order for poems to be written. Robin in the ' moth poems' had moths just coming in in the wildest places, something where the odds would be about a million to one of the moths being just exactly the place that he wanted the poems written, but I was there a couple of times when it happened. And I think that it is certainly possible that the objective universe can be affected by the poet. I mean --you recall Orpheus made the trees and stones dance, and so forth -- and this is something which is in almost all primitive cultures, and it, I think, has some definite basis to it. I' m not sure what. It' s like telekinesis, which I know very well on a pinball machine is perfectly possible and the Duke experiments have not shown it impossible at all. But again, the physical world reacting, you don' t know really. But yes, I think that you do have things happen simply because the poem wants them to happen. No question about it. And the Hindu girl on the bus. But I mean, how this operates I haven' t the vaguest notion... you could probably figure it out scientifically if you know enough about the science of change, combination, permutation, all of that, --- I don' t know. But I know that it has happened. And it' s happened less to me than it has to other people. And I think it' s happened more to Robin than to Duncan, who tends to fake up a few things, like any good medium does.

Q: What happens if the poem wants you to happen?

J: I think both you and the poem explode. No, really, it' s like saying what happens if a farmer wants a cow to be -- to happen. The farmer wants to milk the cow. The cow is to be milked. And I suppose there could be a kooky farmer that wanted the cow simply to remain in its cowness. But I don' t really know what would happen, except that the cow would get awfully sick after a few days of not being milked. And -- I just don' t think that whatever the source of energy is -- gives very much of a damn about you. It wants to keep you in good condition, just like the farmer wants to keep the cow in good condition -- or the butcher, or the rancher and then the butcher, wants to keep the steer in good condition until its butchered.

Q: You said that the visitor is limited by the tongue of the host... I' m thinking of the Pentecostal Church where people go into a state and start speaking with the tongue of God and something that they don' t recognize themselves. This has been taped -- in an experiment in Seattle a couple years ago.

J: Yeah -- except I' d have more respect for that -- except that a few years ago at North Beach -- I think I started it, or either I or John Ryan started it -- we decided to start talking in Martian just to bug the tourists. And after a while we could actually converse in Martian to each other. And no recognizable linguistic things or anything else. But right now I could speak in tongues

and it wouldn' t be anything but some kind of switch that you pull... It' s perfectly possible for me to fake an unknown language. And-- so, I don' t know... On the other hand the experience of Tzara and all that, may mean that there is some way there. I just don' t really believe in it too much, because... y yumbekionshtyk' un yk shutd ick mudit taek unponslya? Ish ne patronia temp? Ga. Kushinee pat ta.

Q: But I can look at you.

J: Dash nyebutle pont.

Q: You' ve got our language going at the same time...

J: Gol sydnayea pudia padyaa... Spa!!

Q: Jack, I was going to ask you if you' ve ever had the experience of having a line that you were satisfied with at the time that you did like later, and that wasn' t going in the other direction? ...

J: Oh, I think my experience -- and this is just mine -- Jesus, you know, don' t take me -- everybody has a host to this parasite, has a different reaction -- but my thing is that I write it down too fast to be pleased with it if it' s really a good line that I like and then I' ll see that I liked it after the whole thing was through... In other words, if there' s no tesistance, if the thing saying the thing is exactly what the host wants to say, the host just doesn' t have any feeling that he' s said anything -- it just goes through like a dose of salts.

Q: This could sound as if you were so busy writing it that you had no time to stand back and make a judgment of it.

J: Yes, but on the other hand there are plenty of times when you' re so busy writing it and you have to wait two hours because the thing is coming through in a way that is, seems to you wrong. It may be that you hate the thing that' s coming through so much, and you' re resisting it as a medium -- or it may be that the thing which is invading you is saying, "Yeah, well, that' s very nice, but that hasn' t anything to do with what this is all about." And you have to figure that out and sometimes it takes a number of cigarettes and sometimes a number of drinks to figure out which is which. And it' s a dance in some way -- between the two. And you often fall on your ass -- get the wrong one.

Q: Do you think you shouldn' t interfere with it?

J: No, you have to interfere with yourself. You have to, as much as possible, empty yourself -- for this, and that' s not non-interference. I mean, it takes about as much -- it' s almost like an athletic thing. It takes a huge amount of practice to be able to avoid blocking a person when you' re not supposed to block the person on the play, when you' re suppoed to let him in to be mousetrapped. It takes a huge amount because you have this natural impulse,

you know, anyone' s coming by and you block him. And it -- the business of being able NOT to do something, especially ehings which are so important to you -- are YOU -- you know, the big Me -- that kind of thing. It takes a tremendous amount of patience and everything else. It doesn' t take humility, since I' ve never seen a humble poet.

Q: Jack, where do ideas come into this? I have the feeling that you' re talking about writing a poem starting with virtually nothing and letting it come as you start to write it... What happens if you have an idea to begin with... you want to develop and individual lines woudn' t count as much as the overall...

J: Well, what I' m trying to say is that if you have an idea that you want to develop, don' t write a poem about it. Because it' s almost bound to be a bad poem. You can have an idea that you want to develop and the poem develops an idea which is a little bit different, say like Pope' s Essay on Man which was supposed to please Bolingbroke enormously, and didn' t -- and didn' t please Pope. And I' m using just about the so-called most disciplined poet here. I mean, you can really start out with an idea that you want to write about how terrible it is that President Johnson is an asshole, and you can come up with a good poem. But it will be just by chance and will undoubtedly not simply say that President Johnson is an asshole, and will... really have a meaning entirely different from what you started out with the idea of. I mean, if you want to write a Letter to the Editor, then the thing to do is to write a Letter to the Editor, as far as I can see. And it doesn' t seem to me that poetry is for that.

Q: You said the thing was like a dance -- then it really is the rhythm more than anything else that is coming through, not the words, not ideas...

J: Well, it' s the rhythm between you and the source of the poetry. And you have to dodge here -- and it has to dodge there, and all of that, and you' re going to make some missteps -- and maybe the source is just as bad as you are, I' ve never been able to figure that one out. I mean, this Martian, this ghost, this whatever the hell it is, may be just as dumb in its own way as you are -- and may misstep too. But since when you' re dancing you worry about where you misstep, not how your partner does, and you try to adjust your step to your partner' s, so it is in this horrible -- sometimes -- interlocking of you and the poem. And the you just has to -- well, it doesn' t lead.

Q: Well then would the poet not be the creator? The poem itself would exist outside the poet and through a spiritual existence...

J: You mean can we take credit for our poems?

Q: Yeah, well no... that the poem exists to start with and the poet takes...

J: Well, is a radio set the creator of a radio program?

Q: No -- well that' s what I mean.

J: Yeah, but at the same time you don' t get the radio program if the radio set has static in it.

Q: Oh, no, no -- but the poet is an agent then.

J: Yeah, like the mother is -- yeah. I' ll bet, you know, -- it' s pretty hard for a father to have a baby. I mean, good agents are kinda hard to find these days. I don' t really see that it' s anything less to be proud of to be a good agent than -- No, I don' t think -- I really, honestly, don' t feel that I own my poems and I don' t feel proud of them.

Q: Well, when you say I' m going to start writing a poem... you' re just letting yourself interfere with the...

J: Not necessarily. It depends. I' m usually suspicious. If I want to write a poem. If I figure, O this would be just a great time. I' ve had a lousy time at the bar. I' m frustrated, everything else. I' d feel great in the morning if I had a poem. Well, I know very well that this is a lousy, lousy time to write a poem. But occasionally, after an hour or os of me trying to write the poem for the poem, a poem nudges me on the back and starts coming through. And by that time, it' s sun-up and I' m real pissed off at the whole thing because I really, if I' d known it would be that late that I' d have to work I' d rather have gone to sleep instead and not had the glory of it, you know. And it depends, I think, on the person -- everyone' s a different kind of host -- and I can tell you about my own experiences and no one else' s. And I think the general things I' ve outlined are true about dictated poetry.

Q: Are the great poems... the poem that scares the poet?

J: Yeah. It says something that the poet not only didn' t mean to say, but doesn' t quite understand, or draws back from and says, Oh yeah? But this is not right. Or the poem, when you' re trying to seduce someone, will make the person run five miles away -- screaming.

Q: Where' s this put the audience. You know, like if it scares the poet? ... How does the audience get around this.

J: Well, to begin with, I don' t think the messages are for the poet... anymore than a radio program is for the radio set. And I think that the radio set doesn' t really worry about whether anyone is listening to it or not and neither does the poet. And I don' t know what the poem does. The poem may have some Neilsen ratings of its own -- it carries on in the middle distance somewhere. But I don' t think the poet ought to worry about that. On the other hand, I think the poet ought always to read poems to an audience simply because often he can find things from the audience' s reaction that he didn' t understand the poem said, which tell him something about it. I mean it' s just as important to be able to understand your own poetry as someone else' s. And most poets I know, including some I admire, don' t read their own poems. I mean,

they read them out loud to audiences, but they very seldom read them back to see what the things are that would scare them about them. They just, you know, just put them in orphan asylums -- you know, Grove Press and that kind of thing -- just let them there and give them fifty bucks for ' em -- you know, baby farms.

Q: I don' t see where this allows for any individual ability, though.

J: Well, I think individual abilities are the same as the individual abilities in sainthood.

Q: Well I was thinking of the individual ability of the radio -- if you have a number of radios tuned in to a source, then the same material would come out of each radio.

J: No, it wouldn' t.

Q: Well, you' re talking about source now -- are you talking about a different source for you and a different source for him and a different source for him? Or are you talking about a universal source?

J: That' s what I don' t know. I would guess so offhand, but probably that of all the things that are the best analogies, and this is just a guess, and I have no idea of it at all, just like spirit mediums get five or six different programs playing almost simultaneously, and there are some which are definitely against the spirit medium and everything else, you know, the Little Eva voice and so forth and so on. I would guess that there are a number of sources and I have no idea what they are or anything else, and frankly I don' t think it' s profitable to try to find out. But as far as the radio sets are concerned, it' s not a good analogy now, because even the worst transistor is built pretty good. But if you take the first days of radio, I imagine the difference in transmission of signals and static and so forth would have been enormous. And I would think that we probably always will be crystal sets, at best.

Q: This process that you' re talking about now. In the 1940s in Berkeley did you and Duncan share this, or is this something that occurs much later? A way of writing poetry or a kind of poetry? --

J: I don' t think that either of us had either intellectualized it or come to grips with it. No. I think that it' s sort of something that the more you write poetry, the more you see what poetry has to do, and doesn' t have to do with your own life, the more you get to that. And we got to it both in an earlier age than Willie Yeats did. But still it' s something that -- I mean, I don' t think that any intellectualization of the thing really matters too much. But I do think that if you keep your ideas closed and your mind, that you have a better chance, by and large.

Q: What about dreams -- Do you dream poems? ...

J: No. No, I dream that I' m writing a poem sometimes -- but I' ve never woken up with any lines from them.

Q: If you don' t have them, how would you relate that to what you' re saying?

J: I don' t know. I don' t know. I mean, there are all sorts of physiological mechanisms in the human being that are pretty difficult to understand -- dreams are certainly one of them. I don' t know -- the only experiences I' ve had with dreams is dreaming about what happens the next day in just as idiotic a way as if it had happened the day before. You know, I mean, somebody loses a pencil and you can dream it either the day before they lost the pencil or the day afterwards and in both cases it doesn' t have anything to do with anything. I mean, it' s just because people lost a pencil. I mean, what do you get from that? And at least that' s my experience with dreams. But I guess other people have different experiences. I don' t know. It' s just my own. It' s perfectly possible. Drugs the same thing. I' ve never been able to get anything out of drugs. But some people have... Well, let me now, if we can get this light on... because essentially some of this will deny what I have said because it' s only my intellectualization of what -- I know myself, not as anyone dictated to, but as -- well, not as one being dictated to at the moment.

This "Textbook of Poetry" is the third part of the HEADS OF THE TOWN UP TO THE AETHER, which is a complicated book, it' s all one book... The three books in this, the "Homage to Creeley", "The Fake Novel of the Life of Arthur Rimbaud", and finally, "The Textbook of Poetry", all do connect and they connect in very important ways, but I think that the only thing reading it separately that I have to tell you is, that in a sense the first book, the "Homage to Creeley" was on the analogy of Dante' s Inferno. The second book, "The Fake Novel about the Life of Arthur Rimbaud" was analogous to Purgatorio, and "The Textbook of Poetry" is analogous to Paradiso. And there are images that come through here that have been reinforced. I think only the one image which is throughout the book... well, the first book, "Homage to Creeley" is almost entirely on Cocteau' s Orphee, the second book on the biography of Rimbaud and the third book on -- sort of the wisdom of the thing. Throughout it and through the whole book runs the business of the pathway down into hell. The methods of communication -- the radio, the dead letter office, the fake novel, and finally the textbook which is printed as if it were prose and has to be read more or less as if it were prose... listen to it as what it says what what we' ve been talking about, and the differences between what it says and what I say. And there are some differences. This, I think, is as near to dictation without interference from me as I' ve written.

1

Surrealism is the business of poets who cannot benefit by surrealism. It was the first appearance of the Logos that said, "The public be damned," by which he did not mean that they did not matter or he wanted to be crucified by them, but that really he did not have a word to say to them. This was surrealism.

But even the business of ignoring the public is the business of the poet and not the surrealism of the poet. The surrealism of the poet could not write words.

To be lost in a crowd. Of images, of metaphors (whatever they were), of words; this is a better surrender. Of the poet who is lost in the crowd of them. Finally.

2

To define a metaphor against the crowd of people that protest against them. This is neither of our businesses.

It is as if nothing in the world existed except metaphors -- linkings between things. Or as if all our words without the things above them were meaningless.

"Personify," you say. "It is less abstract to make a person out of a sound." But the Word was the Word not because he was personified but because he was a personification. As if he were human.

To proclaim his humanity is to lie -- to pretend that he was not a Word, that he was not created to Explain. The language where we are born across (temporarily and witlessly) in our prayers.

3

"Poor bastards, trying to get through hell in a hurry." Pray for them bastards who are not patient enough to listen. The flying leaves of a moving tree, a bleeding tree. In a crowd of imaginary images.

Pray for them poor bastards who are too crowded to listen. An angle cutting off every surface to the prayer, the poem, the messages. An angle of the mind. Meaning to do this.

They go through life till the next morning. As we all do. But constantly. As if the shimmering before them were not hell but the reach of something.

Teach.

4

Taught. As a wire which reaches. A silver wire which reaches from the end of the beautiful as if elsewhere. A metaphor. Metaphors are not for humans.

The wires dance in the wind of the noise our poems make. The noise without an audience. Because the poems were written for ghosts.

The ghosts the poems were written for are the ghosts of the poems. We have it second-hand. They cannot hear the noise they have been making.

Yet it is not a simple process like a mirror or a radio. They try to give us circuits to see them, to hear them. Teaching an audience.

The wires in the rose are beautiful.

5

The motion of the afterlife. The afterlife of the poem--

Define ghosts as an India-rubber eraser created to erase their own past.

The motion of the afterlife. And you will think immediately of a photograph. The ghost of it defined as a blob of ectoplasm -- an anti-image.

An anti-image as if merely by being dead it could make the motions of what it was to be apparent.

An argument between the dead and the living.

6

The poet thinks continually of strategies, of how he can win out against the poem.

Seeking experience for specific instances, drawing upon the pulp of the brain and the legs and the arms and the motion of the poet, making him see things that can be conveyed through their words.

Or disbelief too. Seeking experiences for specific instances. And in the gradual lack of the beautiful, the lock of the door before him, a new Eurydice, stepping up to him, punning her way through his hell.

They won' t come through. Nothing comes through. The death

Of every poem in every line

The argument con-
tinues.

7

Nothingness is alive in the eyes of the beloved. He wears the clothes wherein he walks naked. He is fame.

Sounded ahead by the trumpets of unreason. Barely accounted for by the senses. He is what he is because he is never where he is.

I cannot proclaim him for he is not mine. Eros, Amor, feely love, his body is more abstract than all the messages my body sends my brain of him. And he is human. I cannot proclaim starlight for it is never in the same place.

I can write a poem about him a hundred times but he is not there. The mere numbers prevent his appearance as the names (Eros, Amor, feely love, Starlight) for his fame is as the fame of What. I have not words for him.

8

Descends to the real. By a rope ladder. The soul also goes there. Soley -- not love, beyond the thought of God.

I mean the thought of thinking about God. Naturally. I mean the real God.

Disregards all other images as you disregard the parts of words in a poem. The Logos, crying to be healed from his godhead. His dismay.

Disappears within the flatiron of existence. That smooths out all the words in the poem. Imparts them. Makes them real like the next day.

And as the words heal, I did not mean the real God.

9

If you see him everywhere or exactly nowhere, he becomes as it were the circumference of a circle that has no point but the boundary of your desire. Coming to a point.

And the human witness of this passion is rightly stunned by the incongruity of it. Lifting a human being into a metaphor.

All that we do in bed, or sleep, or sex is limited by this circle which can only be personally defined.

On the outside of it is what everybody talks about. On the outside of it are the dead that try to talk.

Once you try to embrace an absolute geometric circle the naked loss stays with you like a picture echoing.

10

The Indian rope trick. And a little Indian boy climbs up it. And the Jungians and the Freudians and the Social Reformers all leave satisfied. Knowing how the trick was played.

There is nothing to stop the top of the rope though. There is nothing to argue. People in the audience have seen the boy dancing and it is not hypnosis.

It is the definition of the rope that ought to interest everyone who wants to climb the rope. The rope-dance. Reading the poem.

Reading the poem that does not appear when the magician starts or when the magician finishes. A climbing in-between. Real.

11

Boredom is part of the Logos too. You choose His word instead of someoneelse' s because you are bored. Meaningless words stick in the throat and you cough them up as an abstraction of what you are trying to cough up. A green parrot that was talking away that was lost and no one could find it.

An argument with the dead. That is what these pauses are mainly about. They argue with you that there have been no beauty, not even words. They speak out of the right side of their mouths.

See them in the distance not understanding their destiny as we do not understand ours. Making a metaphor inhuman as hell. Standing under the shapes and forms and play with us like a camera selecting.

12

Being faithful. And you are only being faithful to the shadow of a word. Once lost, once found -- in the horny deeps below finding. Once cast ashore upon me like the heart' s cargo.

And this is a system of metasexual metaphor. Being faithful to the nonsense of it: The warp and woof. A system of dreaming fake dreams.

Being faithful to it. All the ache of remembering the past, what the body doesn' t know -- the ache that isn' t really there.

Sorry for themselves, the Words beckon terribly to me. They wave the past out the door: " Goodbye, I love you. "

Being faithful. I pray hope to it. Not them. Not even the words.

13

Built of solid glass. The temple out there in the weeds and California wildflowers. Out of position. A place where we worship words.

See through into like it is not possible with flesh only by beginning not to be a human being. Only be beginning not to be a soul.

A sole worshipper. And the flesh is important as it rubs into itself your soleness. Or California. A division of where one is.

Where one is is in a temple that sometimes makes us forget that we are in it. Where we are is in a sentence.

Where we are this is idiocy. Where we are a block of solid glass blocks us from all we have dreamed of. But this place is not where we are we are to meet them.

14

It is not unfair to say that a city is a collection of humans. Human beings.

In their municipal trust they sit together in cities. They talk together in cities. They form groups.

Even when they do not form groups they sit alone together in cities.

Every city that is formed collects its slums and the ghost of it. Every city that is formed collects its ghosts.

Poetry comes long after the city is collected. It recognizes them as a metaphor. An unavoidable metaphor. Almost the opposite.

15

The city redefined becomes a church. A movement of poetry. Not merely a system of belief but their beliefs and their hearts living together.

They are angry at their differences -- the dead and the living, the ghosts and the angels, the green parrot and the dog I have just invented. All things that use separate words. They want to inhabit the city.

But the city in that sense is as far from me (and the things that speak through me) as Dante was from Florence. Farther. For it is a city that I do not remember.

But the city that we create in our bartalk or in our fuss and fury about each other is in an utterly mixed and mirrored way an image of the city. A return from exile.

16

It does not have to fit together. Like the pieces of a totally unfinished jigsaw puzzle my grandmother left in the bedroom when she died in the living room. The pieces of the poetry or of this love.

Surrealism is a poem more than this. The intention that things do not fit together. As if my grandmother had chewed on her jigsaw puzzle before she died.

Not as a gesture of contempt for the scattered nature of reality. Not because the pieces would not fit in time. But because this would be the only way to cause an alliance between the dead and the living. To magic the whole thing toward what they called God.

To mess around. To totally destroy the pieces. To build around them.

17

--- A human love object is untrue.
Screw you.
--- A divine love object is unfair
Define the air
It walks in.

The old human argument goes on with the rhymes to show that it still goes on. A stiffening in time as puns are a stiffening in meaning.

The old human argument that goes ahead with our clothes off or our clothes on. Even when we are talking of ghosts.

--- A human love object is untrue.
Screw you

--- A divine love object is unfair
Define the air
It walks in.

Imagine this as lyric poetry.

18

When the gas exploded the ghosts disappeared. There was merely a city of chittering human beings.

What had seemed long losses in the air, on the ground were trivial. What had seemed to be words were merely reflected in the air as heat waves.

There was a tremendous loss of substance when the gas exploded. Things that were there took wing. Flew to the farthest corners of whatever sky had been above it. Keening.

This was upposed also to be the story of the creation of the universe. The pieces of the explosion coming afterwards together breathless. Coagulating whatever truth they could muster.

When the heart explodes, there is a tremendous loss. But when the gas explodes the ghosts disappear. There is merely a city of chittering human beings.

19

"Esstoneish me," the words say that hide behind my alarm clock or my dresser or my pillow. "Etonnez moi," even the Word says.

It is up to us to astonish them and Him. To draw forth answers deep from the caverns of objects or from the Word Himself. Whatever that is.

Whatever That is is not a play on words but a play between words, meaning come down to hang on a little cross for a while. In play.

And the stony words that are left down with us greet him mutely almost rudely casting their own shadows. For example, the shadow the cross cast.

No, now he is the Lowghost when He is pinned down to words.

20

He at the only thing we dreamed of. Golding words -- finer than all the metals you enclose things with.

John Dee with his absolutely fake medium E.K. (who later wrote the Shepherds Calendar) trying to transmute letters to metal all the way through Bohemia. Later, in the 19th century, becoming a theosophist and dying.

They tell of a love that is beyond heat. A chemical formula. Sulphur combined with darkness and a piece of the moon. Then say "I love you" three times and turn around.

Magic, which is trying to hold onto people with your own hands, is funny while surrealism is not funny. There is a place where we can talk and we cannot talk. Both of us.

Heat.

21

Hold to the future. With firm hands. The future of each afterlife, of each ghost, of each word that is about to be mentioned.

Don't say put beauty in here for the past, on account of the past. On account of the past nothing has happened.

Stick to the new. With glue, paste it there continually what God and man has created. Your fingers catch at the edge of what you are pasting.

You have left the boys' club where the past matters. The future of your words matters. That future is continually in the past.

That pathology leads to new paths and pathfinding. All the way down past the future. The words go swimming past you as if they were blue fish.

22

Don't you have a sense of humor? Can't you take this calmly? All the words they use for poetry are meaningless.

Postage stamps at the best. Surrealism a blue surcharge for Tchad. This is an imaginary African kingdom which will never gain independence because it does not exist and is not merely an act of the imagination and did issue postage stamps. This is the poest and the poem talking to you.

To create the beautiful again. It is as if somehow the lovers of postage stamps had created an image of themselves. A red wheelbarrow or a blue image of the unknown. And each stamp we put on the letters they send us must be cancelled, heartlessly. As if its delivery, the beautiful image of it, were a metaphor.

23

Wanting to explain. It is wanting to explain. And all through it burrows of rabbits hover like mice in chimneys or metaphors in the middle of a gingerbread cake.

The poet wants to take up all the marbles and put them in his pocket. Wants marbles. Where the poem is like winning the game.

It is so absurd that the rats calling, "Credo quia absurdum" or the cats or the mountain lions becomes a singular procession of metaphors. Each with their singular liturgy.

These are words and their words holler hollowly in the rabbit burrows, in the metaphors, in the years of our life.

24

St. Elmo's Fire. Or why this will be a textbook concerning poetry for 20,999 years. Almost a lifetime.

I chicken out at the edges of it and what doesn't come through to me at the edges of it isn't as if angels met singing or any of that business.

We are all alone and we do not need poetry to tell us how alone we are. Time's winged chariot is as near as the next landmark or busstation. We need a lamp (a lump, spoken or unspoken) that is even above love.

St. Elmo's Fire was what was above the ships as they sailed the unspoken seas. It was a fire that was neither a glow or a direction. But the business of it was fire.

25

Like love being made between fire-engines the poets talk to each other. To put out the fire -- not in each other but the fire that the poems made.

To feel sorry for the bastards. Us. Who walk through hell' s fire without moving (quickly) listening to seashells while in our ears there is its real roar.

Quickly. And then the sea moves toward us conveniently. As if death were an excuse for all of our sorrows.

The birds fly away. The surf breaks on the shore, on the rocks, on whatever the ocean, being ocean, is conscious of. Deliberately.

And the tides pull back against the very bones we have let them.

26

And yet they two bake hearts. Immortal mockers of man' s enterprise.

Unbelieving, the photograph shows nothing of their faces. The two of them. Not even as if they were a strange language.

From the top to bottom there is a universe. Extended past what the words mean and below, God damn it, what the words are. A vessel, a vesicle of truth.

And yet they too break hearts. These humans -- uncoded, uncyphered, their sheer presences. Beyond the word "Beauty."

They are the makers of man' s enterprise. Beyond the word "blowtorch," the two of them, holding a blowtorch at all beauty.

27

What I am, I want, asks everything of everyone, is by degrees a ghost. Steps down to the first metaphor they invented in the underworld (pure and clear like a river) the in-sight. As a place to step further.

It was the first metaphor they invented when they were too tired to invent a universe. The steps. The way down. The source of a river.

The dead are not like the past. Do not like the passed. Hold to their fingers by their thumbs. A gesture at once forgiving and forgotten.

The eye in the weeds (I am, I was, I will be, I am not) The eyes the ghosts have seeing. Our eyes. A trial of strength between what they believe and we.

28

We do not hate the human beings that listen to it, read it, make comments on it. They are like you. It is as if they or you observed one continual moment of surf breaking against the rocks. A textbook of poetry is created to explain. We do not hate the human beings that listen to it, the moment of surf breaking.

It is fake. The real poetry is beyond us, beyond them, breaking like glue. And the rocks were not there and the real birds, they seemed like seagulls, were nesting on the real rocks. Close to the edge. The ocean (the habit of seeing) Christ, the Logos unbelieved in, where the real edge of it is.

A private language. Carried about us, them. Ununderstanding.

29

That they have lost the significance of a name is unimportant. In hoc signo vincit (or the passive troubling probability troubling the restless sea which the restless poets support with their metaphors about it being as how it isn't there).

Now the things that are for Jim are coming to an end. I see nothing beyond it. Like a false nose where a real nose is lacking. Faceless people.

The real sound of the dead. A blowing of trumpets proclaiming that they had been there and been alive. The silver voices of them.

To be alive. Like the noises alive people wear. Like the word Jim, es-specially --- more than the words.

. . .

Q: The thing about soul and flesh. I think you said you have to be soul, but you have to get rid of the soul, or something. But then you said it's important to brush up against the flesh.

J: Well, yeah.

Q: That's a contradiction.

J: No. In the first place, these poems are largely using the incarnation of Jesus as a metaphor for poetry. Metaphor means, you know, 'bearing across'. Which is a nice pun in itself. And the soul and the body are two things which both have to be incarnated in the kind of poem which goes through. It's not necessarily the same soul. In other words the soul of the poet is not the soul rubbing against. ...

Q: When you were talking about the city...

J: Yeah,

Q: ...this city became a metaphor. It sounded like real cities like San Francisco, Vancouver -- and then -- this was a place wherein there were cities of poets? Or?

J: Cities of anything. Chittering human beings. Yes, communities -- like this is a city at the moment.

Q: And I got a funny, strong sense that you felt or that the dictation said that poems and poets were very much a communal thing. And it wasn't the soul in battle or argument with the dead...

J: Yes. Well, but there is the City of God -- the Civitas Dei of St. Augustine which all the cities, including the glass palace, in some way, mirror, and are imitations of -- and the City of God as a metaphor, just like Christ is a metaphor -- borne across -- is the ideal city as compared to the real cities. This group here /10 - 19/ ... is essentially, I would say, about the relation of the poem to the audience -- and the poets to the audience. And you will notice that the ghosts also inhabit the cities, and the cities develop ghosts after they develop slums.

Q: That's where I got, well, confused -- about heaven which is what I plugged in for city at one point.

J: It is plugged in for it. Just like "the word" is sometimes capitalized and sometimes in lower case. There is a confusion between the City of God and the city, the community and the Civitas Dei. ...

Q: Well, that section about the puzzle of your grandmother is so extraordinarily personal, as if it's a recollection.

J: It was.

Q: Well, then how do you say you must put yourself out entirely?

J: No, what I'm saying is, -- just like I said, the Martians could take these alphabet blocks and arrange them in the room. You have the alphabet blocks in your room -- your memories, your language, all of these other things which are yours which they rearrange to try to say something that they want to say. The thing is using my memories, which, I think, as far as any poets I know, -- in the most dictated poems, their memories are used, naturally, because that's all there is to it. I mean, when I say Martians just to be funny -- but just to make it even funnier, suppose Martians were trying to communicate -- they couldn't really say, "Upon the uxshul was on the prossl," and so forth. They would have to use your own memories and what your things were rather than theirs. And so what the thing is, is the nearest relationship I see, is -- that the Martians can see -- is that if my grandmother chewed up the jigsaw puzzle, which was in her bedroom when she died in the living room, -- and that could be in different people's memories, different people's terms, almost anything, which is why poetry is hard to translate.

Q: What happens when the sources disappear?

J: You either write bad poetry or stop writing, -- til they come back.

Q: And you would say that there isn't much hope in chasing them because you might find that they just might run away farther.

J: Mmm... You have to keep a kind of lookout for them. You can't catch them like canaries by putting salt on their tails. You sort of give them an even chance. I mean, show them there's a good dinner of blood like in the Odyssey where they dug the trench and slit the throats of the sacrificial animals and all that. It's likely to summon them.

Q: Well, you have to be available and vulnerable.

J: ...Yeah, that's one of the problems.

Q: Well, what I was directing the question at simply was your chances of finding out what the sources are. You say you don't ask questions because ... now, why don't you ask questions. Because it seems to me if you could /question/ the sources you might be able to get closer to them.

J: Well, I think the answer to that is this... I think it's a fairly good answer. I don't know. You'd have to read some of the things I've read. E. M. Butler's Myth of the Magi is a good example of those people who wanted to understand what the sources were and summon them down. Well, like Faust ... A good example -- generally got messed up by 'em. You'd have to be much more gentle, otherwise they destroy you. And I suppose there's nothing wrong with that -- this town destroys you anyhow. But in the meantime though, you do get some poems when you have a non-agression pact with whatever it is ... I've just never seen anyone who messed with finding things out. I mean the philosophy about it is fine. Making lovely statements or writing essays doesn't hurt anybody, but the closer you mess to it the worse off you get... and the more it eats into you. It's like the ring is in Tolkien. It's pretty powerful ju-ju. You know. Better not mess with it too long. Better stay when you've used it.

Q: Getting back to this idea of the creative insights being isolated from the medium. Are you saying that all poetry has to be written this way or that some poetry is written this way?

J: Well, I certainly don't know... you mean, if like a recipe for baking a cake, obviously -- no. If you mean believing in all of this -- obviously no. But it's my firm conviction that all poetry --good poetry-- is written this way ... in spite of the poet.

Q: ...A lot of your poems convey, -- one line will convey a powerful lot of information and another line conveys very little and... it works sort of back and forth and you've got bits of insight coming in here and it seems to me that the next line would take an awful lot of study. It doesn't seem to say very much that directly connects to anything, and my thinking of this is that if some-

one took the idea and sat down and labored it and labored it, and worked it over until he solidified it, then first of all, he is not writing mediumistically, and secondly he has an idea he begins with and works in into a poem -- which is the contradiction to a, or the opposite of what you' re saying here and yet it would seem to me that' s one way of writing a poem.

J: Well, it' s one way that a lot of people write poems, including good poets. However, I think that unless they do write good poems the other thing sneaks in ... Ron Loewinsohn is a typical example in San Francisco, -- he' s written some very good poems. He would tell me the plots of poems he was writing. He would write a poem about Willie McCovey and there would be this and this and this and there' ll be this sequence, without having written the poem... Well Jeez Ron, why don' t you write a short story? Or a letter to the editor. And usually, it doesn' t work out. Occasionally it does. And occasionally the thing gets through, and the poem about Willie McCovey doesn' t turn out to be about Willie McCovey at all, and doesn' t have the same point he wanted. I don' t know, it just seems to me a bass-ackward way of doing things to try to get your ideas in first and then let the ghost knock them down. But I don' t know. I mean I haven' t the vaguest notion of whether that' s the only way of writing poetry. For Duncan, Creeley, Olson, me -- Ginsberg when he was writing poetry -- that was the way -- and Williams too, in his own funny sense -- where he... thought of the objects as the source of energy, the magickers, rather than anything else -- but where, especially in Desert Music, where the objects were taken over by something else. I don' t know... I don' t think there' s one formula. But I do think that the simplest thing for a poet is not to try to say I have a great metaphor I' m going to put down on paper and expand it... Well, the only good poet who I think does it to some extent is Denise Levertov, and the poems I like of hers are all poems that scared her and that she didn' t really want to have written. ...

Q: The one thing I don' t understand -- earlier you were talking about the way language figures in this process. And you were voicing some criticism of Creeley' s notion of how language figures. And I' m still not clear since language so clearly figures so powerfully as your medium--

J: Well, look Warren, let' s just take it simply first with words. Let' s just do it that way and then we can go to language. Language is a complex system which involves word, gesture and all of that sort of thing and it' s a higher abstraction than words. Now, the point is that words are not something which, in themselves, are anything but low ghosts instead of logos. Words are things which just happen to be in your head instead of someone else' s head, just like memories are, various other pieces of furniture in this room that this Martian has to put the clues in. Now, language is a more complicated thing, but at the same time, it is a structure. It hasn' t yet been scientifically described and it' s doubtful if any two people have the same language. At least -- I' m now speaking as a professional linguist, and not as a poet, and it seems to me that it simply is another layer of stuff that the Martians have to penetrate and have to work with. Please don' t get me wrong. Martian is just a word for X. I

am not saying that the little green men are coming in saucers... going into my bedroom and helping me write poetry, and they ain't. But I think that it's just a higher level of abstraction than the one that Duncan uses, and is less useful because Duncan's at least includes Pound's way of getting to this thing ... where Pound uses history in its ultimate sense... history in the sense of everything connecting to everything else. And when Duncan talks about words, he does it in the same way that you follow back the words, and so forth. But you can follow back the word to its source. You can't, unfortunately, but even assuming you could, you'd get something which was some nice furniture to work with but no more than furniture and as history is...

Q: I still don't understand that...

J: Well, I just think essentially that it's an accident that I have this history in my skull instead of some other history which is absolutely alien to me, but wouldn't... the poem could be written to just as easily. And, if I were an Uzbek poet of the 9th century, I would have the history which would be just as usable in poetry and everything else, and knew that an Uzbek word went back to the Tocharian which came from Indo-European invasion and all of that, it really wouldn't matter terribly too much, it's just one of those things -- the words are counters and the whole structure of language is essentially a counter. It's an obstruction to what the poem wants to do, and the more you understand about the words and understand about the structure of language, the easier it is for you to see where the obstructions are and prevent them, if possible, from interfering with the message of the poem. But that's about all, I think, you can do with it. And you have someone like Eliot who's been, who really just was hung up by this and wasn't able to write any poetry after The Wasteland /Four Quartets?/ on account of it, cause he thought he didn't know enough history, and gotten a few historical things and so he thought, well see, I'd better write plays because I don't know enough about what my muse is, and yet it isn't really. I don't know. Obviously all these things are important for human beings, and since I'm a human being and some of my best friends are too, -- but I don't think that ultimately that's as important as just cleaning things up so that the invaders, the things which are parisitical on you and create poems, can come in.

Q: Well let me push this just a little bit further. For instance, amongst this word furniture -- you have a kind of, well, wicked wit, just in the words. Just, you know, knocking around in the furniture. Does this interfere with the message?

J: I'm always suspicious when my wit comes in. It's -- that's the places where I pause the longest and undoubtedly sometimes it does. I don't think it did in the low ghost thing, although as I say, that was one of the places where I paused the longest, but I certainly do and whenever my -- it sounds like a nice thing I say in a conversation, even a serious conversation, using the wit, I tend to, you know, distrust it... you're talking about a glass. You have an inkwell. And the two things have in common that they can be filled

with a liquid and so, there' s a kind of incongruity about it because you would never drink out of an inkwell and you never dip your pen into a glass. And if you put an inkwell in a glass and filled them both up with something, you show in some ways how things are related even though they don' t seem to be. And this is the kind of thing which the pun in that sense does. It gives interconnections between things which do have interconnections but you don' t really know about them until you' ve had them given to you that way and generally in an absurd way. And I think that the pun has to do not only with the magic of words which we still have as relatives of the ape, but also has to do with our recognition that things are like other things and words can sound alike and it can be something which brings you closer to the nature of reality as well as being quite funny. I mean, let' s take a typical pun. The guy who jumps off the 20 story window and the guy in the 15th story looks at him and yells, "Have you got vertigo?" And the guy who' s falling yells back, "No, only about 14 more stories." Well now, this is incongruous. It causes great pain and everything else, but it connects the two kinds of things, the observer from the window who wondered why the guy fell out of the window, and also the guy falling out of the window -- they' re both part of an existential moment. And "vertigo" and "far to go" bring them together, somehow. And it has something to do with the experience of witnessing death. ...

Q: What happens when the poem is concerned with the poet?

J: Well it all depends. I think that in good poems, -- where the poem' s concern seems to be with the poet as poets, say like Marianne Moore' s "Imaginary Garden with Real Toads In It," the poem that aint, it' s about a lot more things than that. It' s about the whole business of being able to go by the imagination and to whatever other worlds there are where the real toads can' t eat the flies of the imaginary garden and the imaginary garden doesn' t even feel the step of the real toad...

Q: Well what I was meaning was if the medium was saying something about the poet the poet might be caught in a paradoxical situation.

J: He is. Yeah, except for the fact that the poet is not exactly the person who is there the next day, going to his job or talking to friends or getting drunk in a bar. The poet that the poem is talking to is something rather different. I can' t remember any good advice, say, I' ve gotten from one of my poems that has helped me be any happier or any better or sleep with any more people or get any more money or anything else. Poems are pretty useless for anything like that. The advice that they give is just no interested. It' s like somebody treating you fairly abstractly. And so I don' t know. At least, I' ve never had any experience that a poem that I wrote was really interested in my welfare: namely, what I want, my happiness or anything else. It' s usually been the opposite way. They' ve kicked me in the teeth a few times but they never really helped me much.

. . .

Q: ...what effect your poems have on me. They should help me, shouldn't they? ...

J: ...they might help you as a poet, or something like that. I don't really know what they're for. I can't imagine why these dumb Martians are doing all of this. It's probably some funny game they play, but in some sense they do, actually, there's a-- I guess a deep place where the poems do have instructions to the poet... that do matter, even if the poem ultimately says, "Jump off the Golden Gate Bridge." In that sense I was really thinking of the day to day things that one does. And I don't know... the day to day things I'd reply the way that Jimmy Walker, who was mayor of New York replied when there was an anti-vice investigation on dirty books in the 20s, and he said to the committee that was considering censorship regulation, "I never saw a girl who was made pregnant by a book." And, on the other hand, there have undoubtedly been girls who, by the effect of a book, in the long run, have been made pregnant, but it's kind of a real secondary sort of thing.

Q: ...I was carrying it further...than just say the personal day to day thing that happens. I mean when you write a poem and it scares you, and it's a good poem, therefore... there's got to be a playback from that poem that's going to effect your thinking or your actions or something. And also your audience... like when you read a poem and the poem scares you, therefore it's got to do something to you, because if it doesn't do something to you, what's the sense of its existence?

J: Well, I'm not sure that there is any sense for a poem's existence. I mean, I wish I could tell you opposite. I would say that I'm sort of agnostic in this thing one way or the other. I'm not sure. I simply know that I have to write it like that. You know, it's a very funny thing the -- it probably has to do, again, with one of the pieces of furniture in the room -- but it seems to have shaped the last 20 years of thinking. I remember when I was a kid, I used to like to climb mountains with a guy who was in the Sierra Club who climbed mountains. And he heard about Mallory and Irvine and all of this business of climbing up Mt. Everest and disappearing, and Mallory, I guess, saying, "Because it's there." And you know, this struck me as one of the wildest, most far out things in the world. And now kids nine years old use it and everything else. It's become a kind of a part of our way of thinking of things. But in a sense I think it's one of the few things that we, spanning the couple of generations there are between you and me, have in common... that the answer to the thing of the poem is the same answer that Mallory answered why you climb Everest, not to get to the top or to make an important scientific discovery, but because it's there.

Q: Is there feedback to you?

J: Well, yeah... I suppose that if a poet, a good poet, made money like, say, a good drummer, or a good singer, or a good real estate man or a good used car dealer, he might feel more guilty, that, you know, he uses an audience for

his own purposes. Although I haven't seen used car dealers feel particularly guilty. But no, I think that one of the better things about a poet being in the kind of economic state that he is in and has been in for about a thousand years is the fact that really, he personally, doesn't give a damn about the audience except how the audience can in turn help him clear away the lumber that's stuck in the room, and so forth. It can make things clearer simply by reactions here and there, you know, where the reactions don't mean anything, and no one else in the audience would get it. I don't know -- in other words, the poet may try like our fatal Martian, to communicate the poem like the Martian communicates the poem to the poet and there's of course a loss in intensity and amplification and all of the other things where you have a relay station. But he does it -- I don't know why the Martian does it but he does it for pretty damn selfish reasons, and reasons which don't have too much to do with the audience. Although I've noticed when there aren't people around who are interested in my poetry that it hurts my poetry... but interested would mean attacking, as well as -- the thing I mean, I get the least out of would -- is someone saying, "Oh, Mr. Spicer, that was a beautiful poem," you know. I cringe up like that because that is one thing I don't give a damn about.

Q: Jack, could you go back... Blake evidently was a solid sender or receiver.

J: Yeah, except when he decided that he was a solid receiver then he started writing those damn prophetic books, which I have gone through two or three times and I can't make any poetry out of them whatsoever, I mean, I can make poetry every once in a while, see it happening, but really, when Blake was really sure that the angels were speaking to him, they stopped speaking... I don't know... it just may be my blank on Blake, but God knows I've tried... You get up and then you start these damn things of the angel gobbledegook and the angel so and so and so and so and it is the river of light and the something is shining in the something or other. I mean I'm sure I could compose a Blake prophetic book on a computer with a very little bit of programming for the tape. And just...

Q: Well, assuming that he -- what do you think he was doing, just hallucinating or something, then?

J: Well, no. I think he got the idea that he was writing prophetic books allright and so he started writing prophetic books... I think the angels, you know, already left him. I mean, Jesus, take Songs of Innocence and Experience, or take the kinds of things that he jotted down on the flyleafs and the margins of the books he was reading while he was writing what seems to me ghastly stuff, he wrote some just marvelous things. I remember there's one thing which I don't think is included in Blake's Random House Collected Works, -- it's called, he put it in, I think Johnson's "Lives of the Poets", and just on the margin, and he put "The 18th Century. The bat on leathern wings, Winking and blinking, Winking and blinking, Winking and blinking, like Dr. Johnson." /From An Island in the Moon, Chap. 9: 'I say, this evening we'll all get drunk - I say - dash! - an Anthem, "an Anthem!" said Suction. "Lo the bat with leathern

wing, / Winking and blinking, / Winking and blinking, / Winking and blinking, / Like Doctor Johnson." R.B. 7 All this time he had the angels going on, and big lines, and you know, snakes, and all the kinda thing, and, I don't know, it may just be -- there've been plenty of things I've rejected before which I've finally found something in and Blake maybe... but I don't know.

Q: Well, what about Blake's language in the poems that probably are really sent. The language fits into meter and rhyme. --Yours don't, but in certain place you have collected rhyme. What I'm trying to get at, is how conscious, unconscious... how from the other side, how do you

Q: Blake doesn't use rhyme in

J: No, what she's saying is that if you were to take a rhymed poem versus an unrhymed poem of Blake's, there'd be more likelihood that the rhymed poem would be good than the unrhymed poem, although there are some great unrhymed poems. Still, if you just selected by odds--

Q: All the Songs of Innocence and Experience are terribly, heavily -- like conventional rhymes--

Q: I'm just asking where you believe this rhyme come from?

J: Well, it you recall the business of the "screw you" thing... that rhymed to show us the sense of time... as a kind of thing which goes on and on... it's part of the furniture. It's part of what I as a linguist would call language, just like sentence structures which change century by century are -- and anything else. It's a kind of linguistic convention which they can use -- it's a kind of furniture in the room and the furniture in the room a hundred years ago is different than it is today. Rhyme is, I mean, rhyme was a radical thing when it came in in the 8th century. I mean just terribly radical. All of the really cultured poets thought it was just awful and attributed it rightly to Gothic influence and those dirty Okies from the hills, the Germanic tribes, who didn't use rhyme themselves, but... rhyme is, you know, one of the things which is used linguistically by poets, and poets now use rhyme pretty damned funtionally. They use rhyme as a kind of thing like you'd use italics or caps or some other sort of thing.

Q: No, I was just trying to see how you felt about the Martian using it.

J: Well, I think you have to get your house prepared for him and the thing that you're most comfortable with -- it doesn't really matter terribly. I mean, the whole thing of that sort of formalism is just a question of where you have the most freedom and where you don't.

Q: No, but the sonnet is a very conscious form. Now, is this conscious form done by the Martian, or is it done by the poet after the Martian?

J: The Martian says, Well, look, I have to get into this God damned box, which is 14 lines tall -- and I have to rhyme here or there or the other place and so forth... I have to screw my body up this way and that way and so forth -- and one of the nice things about it, the Martian says, is that the poet, on account of the fact that he's forced by these rhymes, won't be able to put in too much of what he wants to put in himself -- you know, if he wants to have the word 'orange' ending the line because he's seen a girl in an orange dress, he's then going to have to invent a rhyme for orange, which there ain't in the particular language of this critter, and so this will keep him from putting some of the personal in. I think that's one of the advantages of rhyme, that it restricts the personal of the poet. But it seems to me that it's like wearing a straight jacket in order to restrict you from scratching your nose.

Q: Well, then the poet is doing a conscious thing by writing it.

J: Well, yeah. Yeah. But the point is that it's just a matter of -- Say that you have to clear out all of the junk from your mind which is going to interfere with the poem which is coming through. Now, there are a number of techniques of doing it. One of the techniques is to have something very arbitrary ... like standing on your head and whistling Dixie. You know... And the rhyme thing, particularly these complicated rhyme things, are very arbitrary, and if the Martian can't get through, you're even less likely to get through than the Martian. You know. And this great message that the Martian wants to tell. And that's one of the advantages of the tight rhyme structure. It keeps you out of it.

. . .

Q: ...rhyme in terms of sound is a carrying across or a bearing over from some sound to a similar sound. And I can't see that that's different than a metaphor in which is also a bearing across or carrying over... like aren't puns metaphors -- aren't they carrying across?

J: ... I have to sound like a damned linguist again. But essentially, it's just like in chemistry-physics, you have the most simple particles and the more complicated particles, and all of that. You can do a hell of a lot more with a molecule. A molecule is much more like a human thing. It can be much more personified, namely, calling it a virus, when it is a virus, than can an electron or a proton. And sounds are pretty goddamned simple things. Furthermore, as far as rhyme goes and sounds go, the tone-leading of vowels, and all of that, if you took the vowels which are in the dialects of people here, who mostly come from the same area but ... some of them have nine, some of them have ten separate phonemic vowels, and so forth, and you have a hundred years difference ... these things change faster and change more in terms of geography than things like puns, which essentially have to do with the morphemics of words, -- the roots of the words, and everything else, which is a higher degree of abstraction. And I had nothing against rhyme and all that. Christ, I think it's in some ways a very nice thing and everyone uses it. But I do think that the 18th and 19th century, at least, made a mistake in using it without great success, except may-

be for Rimbaud in French and Lewis Caroll in English. There was very little use of rhyme to let the imagination free. And in both of their cases they would use nonsense words occasionally and this forced them to nonsense -- which was great. But we don't exactly have to be forced to nonsense today. I mean it's just a way of doing things, a way of discipline. I'm sure for some people it's a very good way, I've nothing against it. It just seems to me that you swim against all sorts of tides, and everything else, if you exclusively use rhyme. Now, Helen Adam, who is a very good poet in San Francisco, not only uses rhyme, but ballad metric, and does it very well. And she lets the rhyme and the metric lead into some of the strangest places you can imagine, and that's very good, and it may be the right thing for a person. As long as it frees your mind of what you want to say, instead of what you need to say, what the poems needs you to say -- anything which takes out the crap of the personal is all to the good.

...

Q: Jack, moving back to dictation. The fact that a good part of Yeats' dictation was by the way of his wife, what does this -- how do you contrue -- does this make sense to you?

J: Tom Parkinson, as you know, talked to Georgie, who is still alive, Yeats' wife, and tried to get her to admit that she was faking the whole thing out, and Yeats was just using this as business for getting the thing. Georgie wouldn't admit it. But she certainly seemed to be a dumb woman. On the other hand, I haven't the vaguest notion. I mean, I just really don't know -- this kind of thing that only happened once. I really don't know what happened. I mean, maybe if I met somebody like Georgie, I could find out. But right now I haven't the vaguest notion, except that I'd say the verdict on it was, at best, not proven.

Q: The Hindu girl in Duncan's poem -- is that part of the furniture too?

J: Well, no. Well, yeah. It's part of the furniture in the sense that anything in the poet's memory is part of the furniture -- like my grandmother's jigsaw puzzle is part of the furniture. But the difference is that my grandmother occurred in the past, and the Hindu girl occurred while Duncan was writing the poem. Which is, you know, making things happen, the poem making things happen and that's the difference -- but in the long run the past and present and future are pretty much the same kind of furniture in the room. Just because a thing happens tomorrow that is in the poem today, doesn't really mean that there's anything more mysterious than something that happened yesterday being in the poem today. I mean the future, the past and the present are in some ways entangled... I don't know how, but they are, and so I just don't think it's terribly important. I mean, you can't really produce a Hindu girl at the snap of your fingers if you want her in the poem.

Q: I wonder if Duncan... I sort of get the feeling that he probably felt when his happened in the present -- now that's just what I want. -- If he felt that way

then he' d have to be suspicious or reject it, wouldn' t he?

J: Yeah. Although you can generally tend to see the thing as something more mysterious than that. I don' t know. It really doesn' t matter... as long as it isn' t anything that you' re really involved with. The Hindu girl could be an airplane, as far as the purpose of the poem goes if it happens the right way in the poem. And I just, I mean, things that you ought to be suspicious of are things which you can use for your own personal interest rather than anything else. I wouldn' t worry about something that appears it' s -- like an epiphany. Well then use the epiphany, but just realize that it could be about 27 other epiphanies which would be just about as good if they happened.

Q: What happens in a poem if you find that you have interfered with it? Would you scrap it? Or would you go back and revise?

J: What I generally do is work by a business of a number of poems building up into a long poem, and I find often that when it seems I' ve interfered, and where I have interfered, the poem comes back and just like the oyster, when it gets a grain of sand in its belly, coats it over, makes a pearl that the things that write the poems just incorporate that in the thing without too much trouble. But then if the poem just stops, the progress of the poems just stops, then I throw everything away, including the good stuff... My writing, since I was a mature poet, has always been in terms of short takes of very seldom a poem of over 40 lines -- a section, oh, over 40 lines -- but almost always a poem which is built up in sections... the serial poem... and so my tendency is to just -- if I really get to a place where the goofing I did with the poem doesn' t allow a pearl to be made of the sand grain, just throw the good parts of the poem away as well as the bad, because, you know, there are plenty of poems... And if I couldn' t go on, if I came to the edge of the mountainside and just couldn' t get up the goddamn cliff, then I' d throw away all of my path up to the mountainside, including all of the good climbs I did, as well as the mistake I made in the wrong turning...

Stan Persky:

A NOTE ON ROBIN BLASER AND JACK SPICER

This is the first significant appearance together of the work of two poets who both (when Spicer was alive) felt particularly close to each other - a companionship - as poets.

In drawing together these pieces to make a composition (a process where my action seems to consist of letting things take shape), I've been haunted by one incident that comes at me with such persistance that I know something's there, though I don't get the point of the story in any neat way.

In July 1965, during the Berkeley Poetry Conference (which was the occasion of a somewhat formal defining of what was happening among poets then), there were many stories taking place behind the scenes. Robin (who tends to use a forthcoming occasion or deadline as a goad) was trying to finish his translation of Nerval's Chimeres, and he'd come to the end of them, after many months, exhausted, uneasy, frantic. More than the good trouble in his eyes that you see when a poet is far away from the tables and chairs in the room, struggling with a poem, there was a profounder uncertainty. Did he really mean to throw them away? We argued in the kitchen -- though I see the furniture, a bookcase with glass panels, did we put dishes in there? the round table where he worked filled with books and drafts, an inevitable green coffee cup, chairs covered in rust-colored velvet, the disobedient white cat laying on one of them, shedding hair, an enamel Mexican spoon on the sink, or its imprint, each thing that I'd been taught to see -- curiously, in memory, I hardly see us there, I guess we barely are.

I knew that my assurances about the poems wouldn't be enough this time. So I said, why don't I get Jack (who I was with most afternoons in Aquatic Park) to come up and hear them. Was it a Friday? and the reading was the next night?

Their relationship as poets was one of absolute loyalty, though by this time their personal friendship had reached a stage where true expressions of it were reserved for moments of extremity (such as we'd have in a couple of weeks when Jack was dying in the hospital, or, for example, when you're breaking up with a lover, there's a 'but, I love you' that can at least cause the other to stop and consider for a second). For those of us who were a peer group under these masters (and Duncan), it was something we could make fun of, apeing their prima donna-ish huffs, first one, and then the other, free to do that in the security of a deeper order. (Hard to get it right; the past as a recollection -- rather than presence in the moment, sometimes I'm inside of -- tends to make this one or that a little larger than life, and of course, there was a professed romanticism. At night, in Gino and Carlo's, we were just people in a bar, falling down drunk, sitting near the jukebox, Jack pretending it was a kind of

malevolent intelligence trying to prevent us from talking -- when we came out on Green St. at 2 in the morning deciding if we would share a cab -- well, as a past, we sort of forget that Aldo or Donato was left to clean up the bar, that there were sticky glasses to wash.)

I went down to Aquatic Park -- bounded by Fisherman's Wharf on one side and ending in a long pier that people fish for shiners from at the other, in-between, a beach, a green slope where we sat on spread-out newspapers, a local railroad track that ran through the park and disappeared into a tunnel under the Presidio (probably only George Stanley would know where it went), and a scattering of buildings and functionally obscure tower shapes done in 1930s white plaster style (the buildings rounded at the edges) so that the whole park was actually, in some architect's fantasy, shaped like a ship (if the fishing pier was the fantail, then the slope where we sat was just aft of the top-structure which was a bath house and concession stand and maritime museum). I guess we spent an ordinary afternoon there, drinking beer, reading the papers, looking at the water, watching strangers -- oh, and since the poetry conference was on, complaining about that. Jack thought it was -- well, more than a vulgarization, maybe something like a conspiracy trying to wreck poetry; maybe he only pretended to hate it that much in service to one of those few but repetitive political lessons he tried to teach young poets, that they should avoid the inevitable corruption as long as possible. (If you have to sell out, and you will, at least make sure you get paid for it.) I think he was wrong, but I didn't then, so I sat there staring with dutiful hatred at that one patch of sunlight across the water -- we darkly imagined it would settle on Berkely (in Aquatic Park clouds hovered, and there was a wind; that's one point -- I had come to regard everything as alive, even the weather had intentions). Jack sat there, legs crossed, shoulders hunched, patches of sunburn on his forehead, wearing those silly Hollywood sunglasses, and probably the shirt that Fran Herndon had made for him, itself a surrealist landscape of purple and green (or was it green and orange?), very much the self-portrait of himself in Language:

> This is the crab-god shiny and bright
> who sunned by day and wrote by night
> And lived in the house that Jack built.

I told him that Robin was unsure of his new poem and wanted him to hear it. Even if this was an unusual request -- like they might be 'officially' not seeing each other then -- there wouldn't be any hesitancy about going. We took the Polk bus up to Union and then the one on Union took us to the top of Russian Hill where we lived. Had Jack already begun to mention that fading feeling he'd been having? anyway when we got there Jack asked if he could take a nap (or was that afterwards? no, before, I think). Anyway, Robin and I could see him sleeping in the alcove, walls of books close by, the white cat on his chest, maybe Robin was in the kitchen changing a last word. (These landscapes keep coming in because that's one important thing if you want to understand about San Francisco poetry.)

Then we sat in the kitchen, Robin and Jack at the table, and I near the bookcase, and Robin read Les Chimeres to him. Jack nodded his head in the

rhythm of the poem as Robin read (he had an active, infectious way of listening) and at the end of 'The Golden Poem', he lifted his head and said, I think, just one word, as I recall it, "Wonderful," meaning also, of course, the pun, full-of-wonder. Just that fast. And all the long uncertainty was dissipated. And then, after, adding, "I wish I could write such an apocalypse." The poem was complete. I guess I'm attracted by that instant of absoluteness in a world that is regularly characterized by its fragmentariness. And that was that.

Since Spicer's death (August 1965), I have Robin's sense of what the shared elements are in his and Jack's work. Most recently, Robin begins with, The world is an action, and "the recognition of the appearance of the world is what the poet takes on himself to record." First, there is their insistance on the mystery, that is, "the visible always moves into the invisible, and the invisible into the visible -- a double play -- and that interplay is a definition of the fragmentation. No two poets know so well that life and death move parallel: the moment you're born, death appears in the world." Secondly, there is what Robin calls the personal cost -- "we share the knowledge that an image held in common has great cost -- that the invisible city is necessarily fragmented and requires the most accurate language to make it possible for other men to catch a glimpse of it -- the cost of that is the extremity of fragmentation." There is "a vision of a city, which then, as it mixes with the world, has to become action." So, thirdly, in such a poetry, one takes complete responsibility for the action, that is, "its authenticity is entirely due to the chances taken by the poet." As Robin puts it, "no man is apparent except as he is the figuration of the movement of the world," and "the story told in each case measures the single, even pitiful, story of a man against the story of the world." Finally, they share the serial poem, which Robin emphasizes, is a building form, "one can only move from one poem to the next in terms of: you catch the invisible movement which holds those two together in that sequence." The serial poem "tends to be the story of the fragmentation which is promissory of completed forms. The completed form always proposes a city, and the city, in modern terms, always proposes paradise -- paradise is always a presence."

. . .

I like the Jack that this selection of mostly early work shows, because it's one that's hard to get. The person of the Bacchae play and the letters to Graham Mackintosh is playful, mischievous, intensely human, someone I like very much. (I guess I dread the wholly serious Spicer that'll be invented by what in my mind appears as an endless procession of grim Pd.D. students -- unless of course, the Revolution puts an end to some of that nonsense -- though at least they'll be forced by Robin's essay on Jack to have to read the poetry.) The early poems are from the late 1940s to the mid 1950s, when Jack began to write his first book, After Lorca (and from then on, only composed in book form). The detective novel and the letters to Jim Alexander are from around 1957-58. And the Vancouver Lectures (the first of which includes poems he regarded as particularly central, written about 1961) come at the end, in a cir-

cumstance in which Jack felt at ease, among young poets in a new Pacific coast city that, for a moment, looked hopeful for him personally. (It ought to be pointed out, for the record, that this transcription and editing, as with the letters and other things, is preliminary and isn't intended to be a scholarly job.) So, in the absence of the edition of Jack's Collected Books (which Robin is working on), this selection is the best introduction to him extant.

I feel that Jack's work can take care of itself -- as with him personally, it has a colloquial immediacy that draws one toward the deepness of it. With Robin, I've been concerned to make sure we have available a clear representation of what he's done in the last 5 years, because this hasn't been done before and will provide the opportunity to appreciate his accomplishment, and will also allow him to read himself (that is, he has the problem of any living poet, which is, what's coming next?). His Chimeres have been talked about (and best appreciated publicly, I think, in Gerrit Lansing's essay on the translation of Nerval), but seen only by a few readers, and it's a pleasure to insist on their primacy. The Fire, written in 1966, is a particularly lucid account of his stance, as well as an extension of his work on Nerval. Since the beginning of the 60s, Robin has been writing one long book, The Holy Forest, which is a series of serial poems which includes, in order, "Cups", "The Park", "The Faerie Queene", "The Moth Poem", "Les Chimeres", and as of spring, 1968, "The Holy Forest". Interestingly, a couple of the pieces of "The Holy Forest" section complete earlier poems that will eventually form a book of his Boston poems, Transparencies. Since 1968 a great portion of Robin's energy as poet has been given to teaching at Simon Fraser University in British Columbia (he's unable to do anything -- poetry, teaching, making a house -- with less than full attention) and a portrait of his thought would be incomplete without some sense of the long series of lectures he's given, primarily on Blake, Pound, Olson, and some of the Greeks. In addition he's been fulfilling the poetic debt to Spicer, editing the Collected Books and writing a Spicer essay. Now the poetry returns with the Pindar translation done for this occasion, which may be (this is just a wild guess) the first poems of the last section of The Holy Forest, "The Great Companions".

. . .

Thanks go particularly to Clayton, as editor of Caterpillar, for opening this space, and to Colin Stuart, for his help in preparing the manuscripts.

June, 1970
Vancouver, B.C.

NOTES

§§§ Copyright for the Spicer Estate by Robin Blaser. All Spicer books are copyrighted in the same way. §§§ My gratitude to Robin Blaser for making all of this material available, and to Stan Persky who collected and ordered it. §§§ Reviews that would have ordinarily appeared in Caterpillar #12, plus a large Books Received list, will appear in the next regular issue of the magazine -- #13. §§§ This summer Caterpillar moves to the Los Angeles area where I will be on the faculty of the California Institute of the Arts. The magazine itself will continue to be published and edited by me. From July 1970 on, until a new address is announced in #13 this October, please address all correspondence/subscriptions/renewals/ inquiries/manuscripts to me c/o The California Institute of the Arts, 2404 West 7th Street, Los Angeles, California 90057. §§§ Spring 1971 Doubleday Anchor Books will publish a 500 page "Caterpillar Anthology" with work from issues #1 - #12. §§§ At this point in the life of the magazine it is appropriate to publicly thank a few individuals who in their own particular ways have made it possible for me to do these first twelve issues: Helene Knox, my landlady Mrs. Anna Donovan, Professor Theodore Grieder, Harold Wit, Burt Kleiner, & Chase Mellen. I would also like to thank The Coordinating Council of Literary Magazines for a $1000 and a $1500 Matching Grant. §§§

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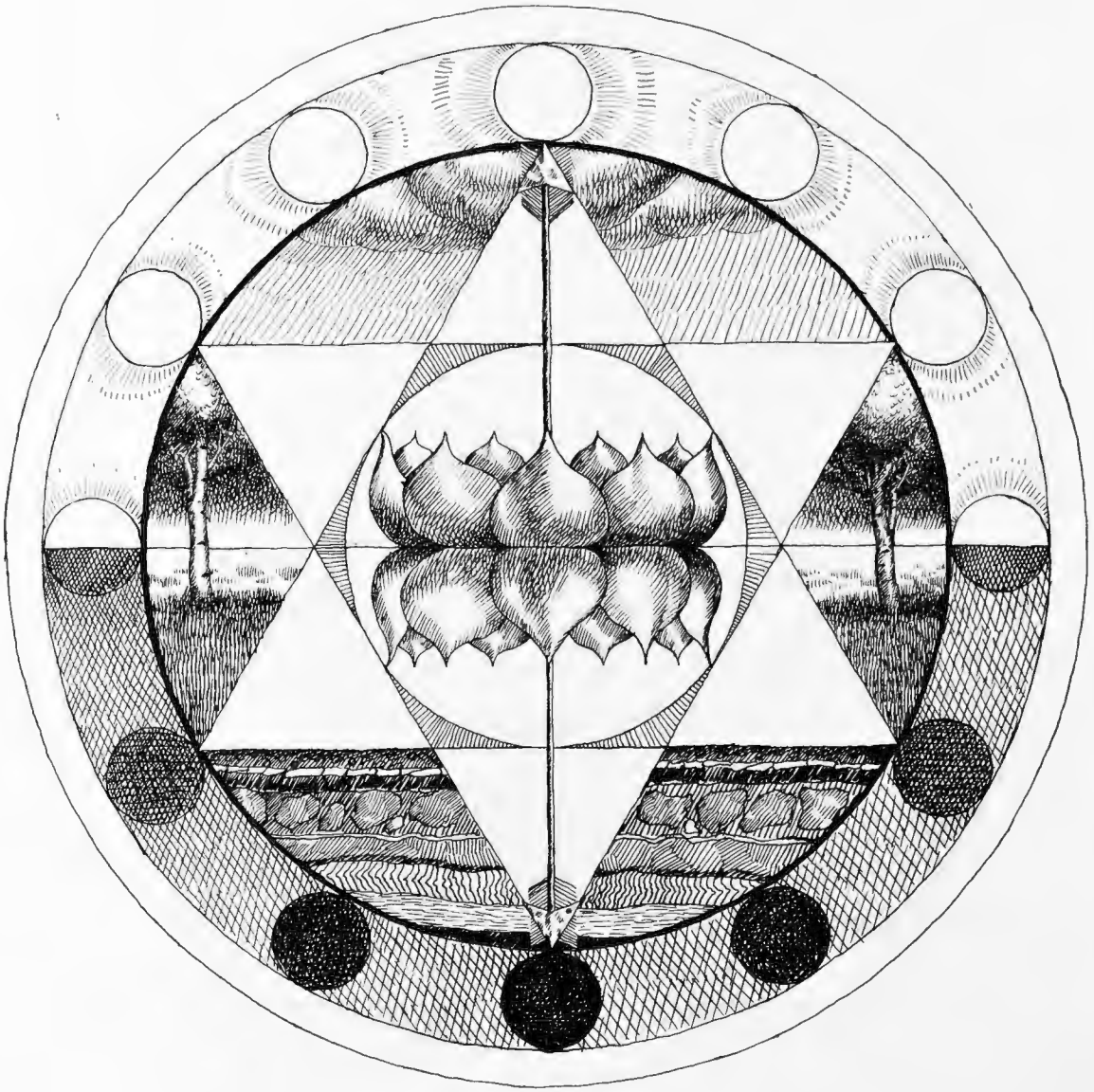

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